



# Collaborative Pathways: Building Transparency and Co-ownership in Transdisciplinary Research

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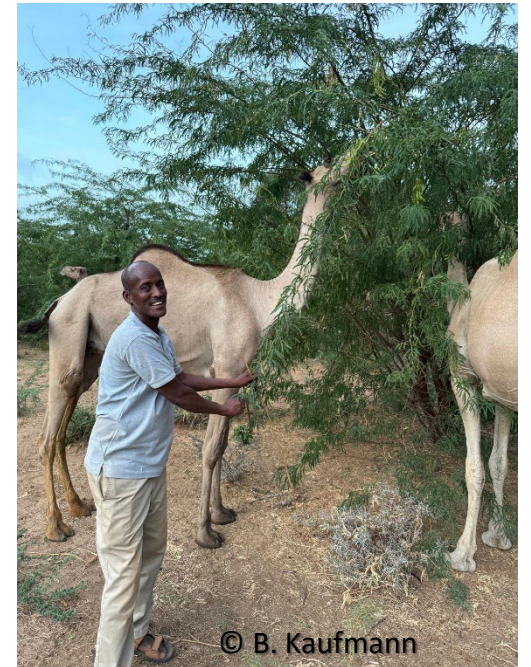
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# Why institutionalising community engagement in TdR

- TdR aims to tackle complex societal challenges by integrating diverse actors (from different disciplines and societal) as equal partners
- In practice, local actors often have limited roles
- Bridging the gap requires institutionalizing spaces where local actors can give regular feedback and advise
- Ensuring transparency, inclusion, and co-ownership of the research process
- Community members as co-researchers

*“This project works with pastoralists involving them in every step. The pastoralists play a central role in this project... everyone is involved in decision-making”*

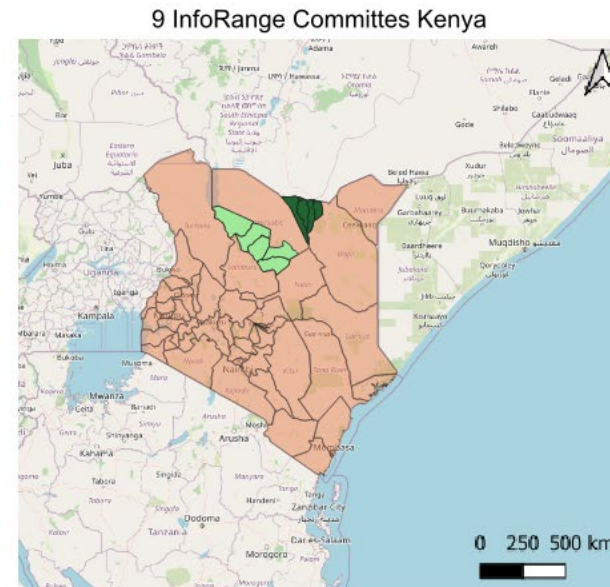
Raphael Gudere



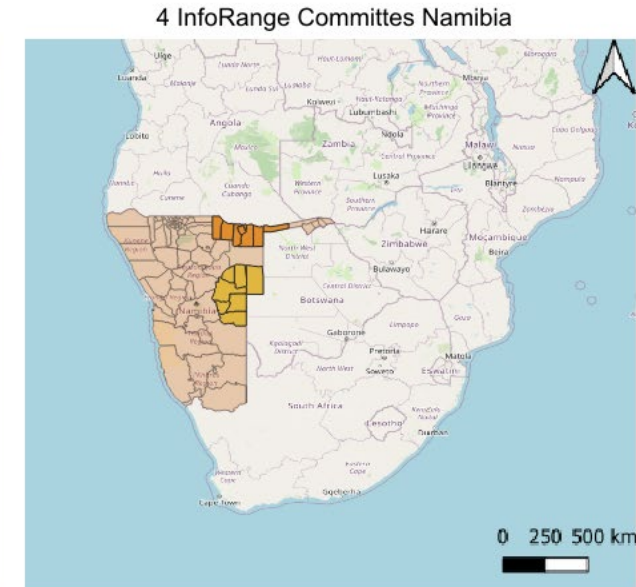
# Community committees in InfoRange

- Locations: Kenya (Marsabit county) and Namibia (Kavango East & Omaheke regions)
- 13 Committees whose members were proposed and appointed by communities
  - 9 Kenya & 4 Namibia
- Inclusive representation using Net-Map to identify all actors, especially underrepresented groups
- Committees included herders, livestock owners, women, and local leaders

## InfoRange Committees in Kenya and Namibia



- InfoRange Committee in Sololo
- InfoRange Committee in Laisamis



- InfoRange Committee in Kavango
- InfoRange Committee in Omaheke

# Feedback Loop

Students involved in the project:

## Kenya

- 7 PhD students
- 6 Master's students

## Namibia

- 3 PhD students
- 4 Master's students
- Regular InfoRange Committee meetings for feedback and dialogue - Not one-time consultations
- In 2024 30+ InfoRange Committee meetings

Two-way communication fostering co-creation



Stick game after beehive as a tool to reflect and give feedback and advice Ngurunit

# Aim

To explore how structured community feedback, through InfoRange Committees, influence the research process

More specifically:

1. What type of feedback do researchers receive from InfoRange Committees?
2. How is this feedback shaping research in practice?



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# Methods

## Qualitative data:

- Quarterly reports
- Recordings of meetings, feedback sessions
- 6 interviews with committee members
- 2 interviews with early-career researchers

*... work in progress*

Thematic analysis of:



# 1. Committees influenced *who* was involved:

The committees made key decisions about inclusion



Guiding researcher to local experts: Active scouts to carry GPS



Selecting trusted community collaborators: Co-design team & VIF



Ensuring gender inclusion in water governance

## 2. Committees influenced *how* research was done:

### Practical feedback shaped methods and ethics



Contextualizing research tools:  
Simplifying instructions & questions



Advising on timing: When to carry  
out sessions, for how long, and peace



Clarifying privacy concerns:  
GPS tracking

# 3 Committees influenced *what* to focus on:

Communities expressed interest in specific lines of inquiry



Monitoring of invasive specie *Prosopis juliflora*



Exploring nutritional quality of grasses

# 4 Committees influenced *how* to interpret results:

Committees shaped meaning through contextualization and how to return findings



Choosing how to share results: Individual maps form the GPS



Contextualizing findings across regions

*... more insight are emerging*

# Learning to communicate across knowledge systems

## Key strategies: InfoRange PhD and Master's student seminar

### Format

- Use clear, jargon-free language. When possible, incorporate local terms
- Use analogies rooted in everyday life or local practices
- Use of visual aids (photos, images, diagrams, and maps)
- Design interactive and hands-on activities that encourage participation
- Involve community members who have previously participated in the process to help with complex explanations

### Content

- Be selective: prioritise key messages
- Linked to the local context by using familiar and meaningful examples

### Personal role

- Approach committees as peers and co-creators of knowledge
- Foster an environment of mutual learning by acknowledging lived experiences and local knowledge
- Make **feedback meaningful** by ensuring it is not only gathered, but also **acted upon** and reflected back in subsequent interactions

# Conclusion: Community feedback as a method

- Feedback as routine, not a checkbox
- It shapes *who has a voice, how research is done, what to focus on, and how were results interpreted, adapted, and shared*

→ This moved researchers toward genuine collaboration

## Raised questions

- Whose voice counts?
- Who sets the terms of engagement?

## Tensions

- Slow down, negotiating expectations, sharing power
- Learning how to communicate across activity systems



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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# Gaps and next steps

## Ongoing efforts by early-career researchers:

- Returning results to communities through context appropriate presentations
- Share updates via WhatsApp
- Facilitate internal committee discussions to help make findings locally actionable

## Emerging gaps and priorities:

- Exploring how to enlarge community–researcher feedback structures
- Exploring the impact of the project/Feedback Loop from the perspective of the committees