

Gender and Climate change: Namibia Case Study

Executive Summary

by Margaret Angula



1. Introduction

a) Country situation

Namibia is situated on the south western coast of Africa, and shares borders with Botswana in the east, South Africa in the south and south east, and Angola to the north. Namibia is a large country, covering an area of approximately 824,268 km² (ibid).

The population is estimated at 1,826,854 for 2001 of which 51.3% are women. The majority of the population (over 60%) reside in the north, where five out of the six most populous regions of Namibia are located. The population density is approximately 2.2 inhabitants per square kilometre (NPC, 2002).

There is matrilineal descent (Ovambo and Kavango communities), bilateral system (Nama and Damara) and double or bifurcate descent (Herero communities) in Namibia. Caprivi communities are matrilineal with strong patrilineal influence. These descent patterns have influence on customary marriages, methods of inheritance and the control of children. Lipinge and LeBeau (2005) explain that all ethnic groups in the country exhibit gender inequality in the form of patriarchy. Women are still viewed as second-hand citizens and at worst as the property of men. Cultural attitudes vary from relative equality to rigid inequality. The majority of Namibian women are responsible for most of the household chores and have no decision-making power within households and community (Ambunda and de Klerk, 2008).

There has been some progress in promoting gender equality in Namibia particularly with regards to ratification of international instruments, government policies and programmes, and gender-related law reform. The Namibian government has established several institutions to address gender inequality. Despite the adoption of human rights laws and the development of gender awareness, most women in contemporary Namibia still face challenges due to the historical imbalance of power between men and women, social structural factors, unemployment and related social problems.

Several studies have been commissioned to study and model the anticipated impacts of climate change, including impacts on biodiversity, the economy and communities, as well as Namibia's vulnerability to climate change. These studies as well as the IPCC 2001

and 2007 reports suggest an increase in temperatures, changes in rainfall, decreases in fog and changes in wind intensity affecting several sectors upon which the national economy and the Namibian population depend for livelihood and income. The top three sectors that are identified as the most vulnerable to climate change are: water, agriculture and fisheries.

Over two-thirds of the population practice subsistence farming and the resulting impacts of climate change could be dramatic as the agricultural sector is crucial to household and national food security. The sector's sensitivity to climate change amplifies the social vulnerability of subsistence farmers, the majority of whom are women. In the extreme, climate change could lead to social disruptions and displacement amongst rural communities. (Republic of Namibia, 2002 and Mfuno and Ndombo, 2005). All these factors impact negatively on women's livelihoods.

b) Description of the Study Areas

Two rural settlements were selected to constitute the two case studies for the research. The two sites were selected taking into consideration the levels of poverty, vulnerability of the community and population size. Epyeshona village was selected because it had experienced floods during the 2007/8 rainy season. The village is densely populated, suffers from land degradation and practices a mixture of crop and livestock subsistence agriculture. Daures constituency on the other hand, is sparsely populated, located within one of the harshest and driest environments of Namibia and practices mainly livestock (predominantly small-stock) farming only.

Epyeshona Village: Located in the northern Namibia. Although most households are still considered poor (NPC, 2007b) there are a number of households with formally employed family members and a remittance system exists in the village. Due to its proximity to one of the major towns, this village has access to modern infrastructure, health facilities, relevant institutions and schools. Inhabitants are Oshiwambo-speaking and are either born in the area or joined the community through marriage or as extended family members. The village falls within the communal area of the Okatana Constituency, Oshana Region and Uukwambi Traditional Authority.

The environmental conditions allow a mixture of crop and livestock subsistence farming. Eco-tourism potential and activities are very low in this area.

Daures Constituency: Falls within the Erongo Region in central Namibia. This constituency is divided into several communal farms. Tubusis, Okombahe, Omatjete and Spitzkoppe settlements are equipped with basic institutional and infrastructure amenities to provide services to communities and surrounding farms. The area is historically settled by Damara and Herero speaking ethnic groups. Although the Damara ethnic group has been the majority in this area, recent studies have reported an increase in numbers of Oshiwambo speaking individuals since 1991 (NPC 2007a). The environmental conditions are drier and allow only livestock (mainly small stock) subsistence farming. Nevertheless the tourism potential and activities in this area are quite high.



2. Methodology

The study makes use of qualitative methodologies undertaken within a broader framework of gender analysis. Specific methods included: literature review, key informant interviews, life histories and focus group discussions. Gender analysis concentrated on the collection and examination of information about the different roles of women and men, the relationship and inequalities between them, their different experience, capacities, needs, constraints, rights issues and priorities. The key focus of interviews and discussions during FGDs was also to assess local perceptions of environmental change, its impacts on agriculture and natural resource base as well as household coping mechanisms.

3. Key findings

- **Understanding gender relations:** This study revealed that there might be changes among gender relations in rural areas due to equal opportunities awarded to women and men. These changes could be beneficial or detrimental to relations especially between wife and husband. Women in the age group of 30 - 59 display signs of women's empowerment to participate in decision-making and economic activities. The elderly women however, still seem to accept the status quo.

- **Understanding climate change:** There is general perception that current climate trends differ significantly from the past. Climatic hazards such as floods and droughts have become more frequent. The rainfall seasons have shifted, become shorter and more irregular thus affecting the potential growth period for mahangu, sorghum, beans, nuts and melons. These climatic shifts also affect regeneration of rangelands resulting in insufficient grazing opportunities for rural livestock populations. Immediate impacts of drought, floods and climate variability are decreased land pro-

“ The sector's sensitivity to climate change amplifies the social vulnerability of subsistence farmers, the majority of whom are women. ”

“Traditionally women are submissive to their husbands and they would first explore other means of ensuring food security before they discuss the matters of food shortage in the household with their husbands, the ‘heads of household’s.”

- **Differentiated impacts of climate variability and change:** The study confirms that men and women in Namibia's rural settings have strong links to environment and climate related variables. However, these links are not homogenous for men and woman. The communities (Epyeshona) that practice subsistence crop and livestock farming as the main source of livelihood have a stronger link to the environment and are therefore more affected by climate. The activity profile assessment revealed that women in such rural settings interact with the environment more than men. Since women are expected to maintain food security in the household they usually do this by complementing the main source of livelihood with other sources in order to prolong household food security. Most of these sources are also climate sensitive and as such the women in Epyeshona are more vulnerable to shifts in climate.

- Women and men in drier environments (Daures) interact with the environment differently. Because in these environmental settings, livestock rearing is the main source of livelihood, men interact with the environment more. The environmental conditions do not offer many opportunities for women to participate beyond their household chores. However, women would still be negatively affected by climate change as most household chores such as collection of water and fuel wood are negatively impacted by climate change.

- Traditionally women are submissive to their husbands and they would first explore other means of ensuring food security before they discuss the matters of food shortage in the household with their husbands, the ‘heads of household’.

- **Coping and adaptation strategies:** Non-agricultural adjustment has been noted. Kuvare et al., 2008 listed examples such as sewing, brick-making, selling of traditional drinks, selling crafts and pottery items. These adjustments either exist or were recommended as coping strategies in Epyeshona village. In particular, women are the first to adapt in Epyeshona, engaging in basketry, processing of marula nuts and oil and selling chickens, pigs or goats. In Daures constituency, there is

a trend of farmers changing to the small-scale mining of semi-precious stones. Here women assist men in selling semi-precious stones to tourists whereas men are mostly involved in mining these resources. Women lack technical skills to participate in formal employment and therefore engage more in informal economic activities. Income generating capacities between men and women also differs. Therefore, in general men are better prepared for climatic events than women due to their improved socio-economic situations.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

A study focusing on gender, climate change and development in Namibia is required. Such a study needs to examine how climate change will impact on the development of women and men. It must also examine how climate change affects gender equality in Namibia. Research institutes should collaborate with SADC governments to produce these data.

There is a need to conduct studies examining gender relations in the contemporary Namibia. Such a study should explore how the relationships between men and women in post-colonial Namibia has changed. It should assess the progress of womens' empowerment and gender equality in Namibia. Finally, it could address challenges preventing realization of womens empowerment in rural Namibia.

Develop climate change programmes that would enhance adaptive capacity of rural women. The report recommends that programmes that offer services such as seeds, fertilisers, credit, market access and agricultural extension services should be developed. Such programmes should clearly ensure womens' access to these services. Programmes should produce information and awareness programmes on climate change and agricultural production targeting rural women in order to enhance their capacities. Government and research institutions should engender their extension,

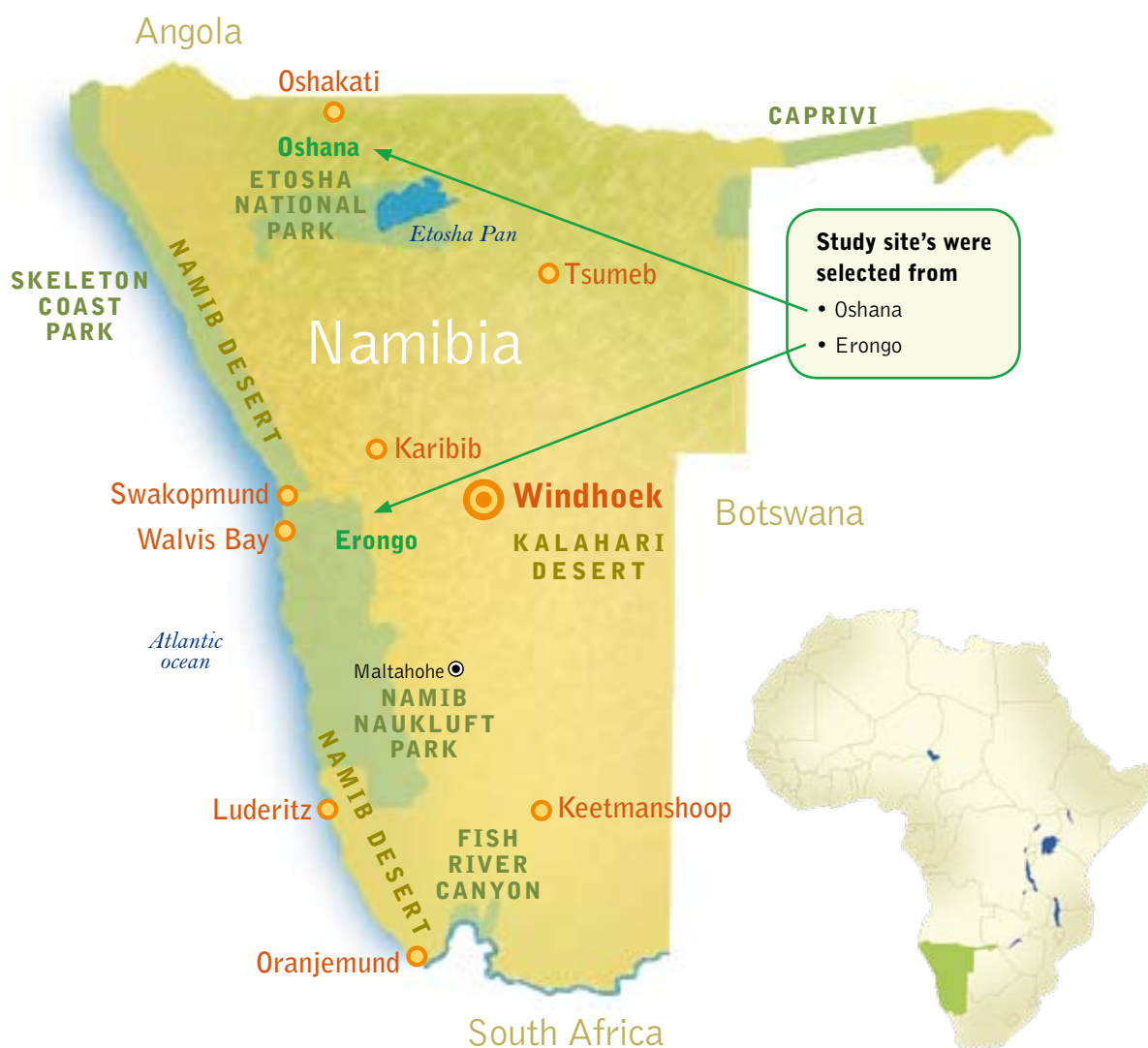
research and service delivery programmes.

More gender disaggregated data and research focused is required to assess community's existing adaptive capacity in dealing with long-term impacts of climate change. Research should determine the advantage of implementing gender-sensitive adaptation programmes. More research to identify the gendered impacts, coping

strategies and adaptation priorities of women and men in urban settings is needed. The National Planning Commission (NPC), Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) and Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) should acknowledge and mainstream gender and climate change nexus into poverty, early warning system and environmental management policy.

REFERENCES

- **Ambunda, L., & de Klerk S. (2008).** Women and customs in Namibia: A research overview. In Ruppel, O.C. (Ed.). *Women and custom in Namibia: Cultural practice versus gender equality*. Windhoek: Macmillan Education Namibia.
- **Fuller, B., (2006).** Improving tenure security for the rural poor: Namibia country study. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). LEP Working Paper No. 6.
- **Giess, W. (1971).** A preliminary vegetation map of South West Africa. Windhoek: *Dinteria*.
- **Iiping, E.M., and LeBeau, D. (2005).** *Beyond inequalities: Women in Namibia*. Windhoek and Harare: UNAM/ SARDC.
- **Iiping, E.M., & Williams, M. (2000).** *Gender and development*. Windhoek: John Meinert Printing.
- **Iiping, E.M., and LeBeau, D. (1997).** *Beyond inequalities: Women in Namibia*. Windhoek and Harare: UNAM/ Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre.
- **International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). (2008).** Gender perspective: Integrating disaster risk reduction into climate change adaptation, good practices and lessons learned. Geneva: ISDR.
- **IPCC (2001).** Summary for Policy Makers. In *Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and vulnerability*. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom.
- **IPCC. (2007).** Summary for Policymakers. In *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Parry, M.L., Canziani, O.F., Palutikof, J.P., van der Linden P.J., & Hanson, C.E. (Eds.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom.
- **Kuvare, U., Ogunmokun, A. and Maharero, T. (2008).** Draft report Assessment of current and on-going projects and programmes to identify existing coping strategies with regard to climate change variability. Windhoek: United Nations Development Programme.
- **Matengu, K.M. (2003).** The diffusion of Modern Technologies in Namibia. Licentiate Dissertation. University of Joensuu.
- **Mendelsohn, J., Jarvis, A., Robert. C., (2002).** *Atlas of Namibia: A portrait of the land and its people*. Cape Town: Philip Publishers.
- **Mfune, J.K. & Ndombo, B. (2005).** *An Assessment of the capacity and needs required to implement Article 6 of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Namibia*. Windhoek: Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Government of Namibia
- **National Planning Commission. (2007).** Erongo regional poverty profile, Main Report. Windhoek: National Planning Commission.
- **National Planning Commission. (2007).** Oshana regional poverty profile, Main Report. Windhoek: National Planning Commission.
- **National Planning Commission. (2002).** *Preliminary national accounts 2001*. Windhoek: Central Bureau of Statistics.
- **O'Toole et al. 2001.** Integrated management of the Benguela Current Region: A Framework for future development. In Bodungen B. & Turner R.K. (Eds.). *Science and Integrated Coastal Management*. Dahlem: University Press.
- **Republic of Namibia. (2002).** Initial National Communication of the Republic of Namibia to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Windhoek, Namibia.



Published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation Southern Africa

Heinrich Boell Stiftung Southern Africa | 123 Hope street, The Avalon Building, Gardens 8001, Cape Town
 tel: +27-(0)21-461 62 66 | fax: +27-(0)21-462 71 87 | www.boell.org.za