Group rights on communal land: Okonyoka revisited

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Importance of group rights

• Private customary land rights protected through registration – group rights not yet
• Urgent: to protect tenure rights of rural poor against unmanaged loss to local elites (land grabbing)
• Causes resentment and increases vulnerability
• Village clusters logical starting point to vest title in groups
• Easier said than done: contestation (traditional authorities; wealthy farmers...)

Current situation

- Groups can apply for registration of group rights
- MLR through the support from CLS project and PCLD actively establishing group rights
- Participatory process to establish land rights
- Establishment of legal entities a requirement
- Responding to widespread demands for the protection of group rights to commonages
Group rights on communal land: Okonyoka revisited

Bottom-up initiatives: Okonyoka

The village

- Ca 15,000 ha
- 32 households in 2015
- Related through 4 lineages
- 986 cattle, 31 horses, 1,409 goats, 752 sheep or ca 1,400 LSU (WPC records, Feb 2015)
- Formation of new households
- New households building up own livestock
Brief history

• Village established 1958
• Increasing pressure on grazing due to new boreholes on its periphery
• Led by youth, villagers discussed protection
• Institutional focus: local water point committee
• Protracted discussion among community and neighbouring communities through their respective water points
• Started to fence in 1998
Social implications

Improvements

• Improved sense of community
• Positive impact on community as a management institution
• Feeling of greater control over rangeland resources

Challenges / disadvantages

• Increasing pressures on grazing resources made community reluctant to take in more people
• Young Herero men, who by tradition had to break away from their fathers find it increasingly difficult to find alternative grazing areas

• Some people have multiple grazing rights – in Okonyoka and outside – which may increase the vulnerability of landless households outside

• Female livestock owners find it easier to settle in Okonyoka as they do not have to ‘break away’ from their fathers

**Differences in gender, age and family status are essential to understand wider processes and complexities of power relations, social change and empowerment**
Environmental implications

Improvements

• In many marginal areas close to community fence perennial grass species had re-established themselves due to reduced grazing pressure
• This impacted positively on condition of cattle, particularly during droughts

Challenges / disadvantages

• Improvements were enabled by exclusion of neighbouring farmers increasing grazing pressures on adjacent villages
Environmental implications ctd

- These were considering to fence their settlement land
- As community rules tightened access to grazing, some households became increasingly marginalised

*Positive impacts on the environmental resource base as a result of fencing came at the expense of livelihood security of marginalised groups*
Policy implications

Improvements

• Many communities in Aminuis want to follow Okonyoka’s lead as a result of positive impact on natural resource base (e.g. Komungondo north of Okonyoka)
• WPC encouraged this development
• Policy gap had provided space for community fencing, empowering some and disempowering others
• Working with organised groups makes it possible for NGOs and others to act as facilitators rather than project implementers
Policy implications ctd

**Improvements**

• Okonyoka wanted to diversify into game and wants to establish a conservancy

**Challenges / disadvantages**

• Positive impacts came at the expense of more marginalise, landless and poor communities

• Unresolved question: should government, NGOs and donor projects be part of a process that further marginalises some members of the wider community despite observable positive impacts?
Policy implications ctd

• *For community empowerment to work the dynamic interplay of power relations between the differentiated stakeholders and the resource base upon which livelihoods depend must be understood*

• *Best case scenario can only be achieved if the social, environmental and policy implications on the wider community are analysed*
Findings

• The fence has disappeared
• Vandalism and theft of fencing material
• Transaction costs of monitoring and guarding fence too high
• Settlement in periphery considered
• Replacement cost also too high (N$4,000-N$6,000 /km)
Fence contested

- No unanimity on the fenced as recorded by Twyman et al
- Boundaries are disputed
- Violent opposition recorded in its erection
- Okonyoka consulted lawyers
- Petitioned MAWF – advised to resolve outside court
Bull camps

• While communal the fence disappeared, private *bull camps* exist
• Estimated to be 30 in number
• 1km x 1km (at least!) = 3,000 ha or 20% of total area
• Typically behind homesteads
• Increasingly further way due to grazing pressure
• Every household is entitled and can apply for a bull camp
Bull camps: Otjinene
**Management**

- Advantages of enclosures well known: rules of access, protection, better pastures
- Management plan and rules were said to exist
- Not physically available – nor well known by informants
- But: managed to control access - only 2 families granted temporary stay since 1998
- Were relatives of resident households
- Village boundaries porous: degree of flexibility exists
Management ctd

• Water point committee still exists
• Functions no longer as described in 2002
• Restricted to manage the water point – whole community said to manage grazing
• Considers requests by outsiders to bring in livestock
• Submits its findings to larger community meeting
• Village Development Committee said to exist with its own bank account
Management ctd

- Managing the community is a challenge
- Some leading community members live and work in Windhoek
- Although meetings are said to be minuted, rules and information not properly transferred to new committee – lack of continuity
Diversification

- Twyman et al mentioned plans to establish a conservancy
- No diversification has taken place
- ‘We want electricity, not a conservancy’
Conclusions

• Limited field work does not support Twyman et al’s assessment that empowerment at Okonyoka was ‘dynamic and flourishing’
• Protection of group rights generates substantial transaction costs – monitoring, maintenance etc.
• The absence of key community members may pose a challenge for managing common pool resources
Conclusion

• Ambivalence about enclosures:
  • Clear advantages
  • Perceived disadvantages – losing access to resources outside village boundary (grazing, resettlement)
Thank You.