

Livelihood Security and Natural Resource Management on Namibia's Kwando River

William Kanapaux¹

¹ School of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

This study examines livelihoods along the Kwando River in Caprivi, Namibia, a semi-arid and economically undeveloped region of southern Africa that is drought-prone and rich in wildlife. Community-based conservancies give local people use rights to natural resources so that they may gain economic benefits from tourism and safari hunting while managing for biological conservation. However, rain-fed subsistence agriculture remains a main livelihood activity in the region and is negatively affected by increasing wildlife numbers.

The objective of this study is to determine the scope of livelihood activities at the household level and how these activities are influenced by wildlife, drought, tourism, and the conservancy. It examines data collected from 60 household livelihood surveys, 10 field surveys, and six focus groups in Mashi Conservancy in June and July 2007. Results show that the study area consists of two distinct populations that have different sets of livelihood activities. The interior population resides on relatively fertile soils that in good years produce cash crops. The riverside population farms on less fertile soils and employs a wider range of livelihood activities that rely on river resources and proximity to tourist lodges to compensate for insecure crop production. Both populations are vulnerable to pressure from wildlife, drought and increased demand on resources.

These differences provide a better understanding of human interactions within a social-ecological system that is attempting to shift from subsistence-based agriculture to a wildlife-based economy and can be used to inform efforts to sustainably manage natural resources at the local level.

Keywords: Livelihoods, southern Africa, community-based natural resource management

Contact Information: William Kanapaux, Center for Environmental Policy, PO Box 116350, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA; Phone: (352) 392-2425; Email: kanapaux@ufl.edu