



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2018, Ghent

“Global food security and food safety:  
The role of universities”

## The Cubango-okavango River Basin: Conservation vs. Food Production? Local Communities Pay the Price

STEPHANIE DOMPTAIL

*Justus-Liebig University Giessen, Inst. of Agric. Policy and Market Res., Germany*

### Abstract

The waters of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB) constitute an important resource in a dry transboundary region, with little economic development. Upstream, Angola is developing industrial high-investment irrigation agriculture, while downstream, Botswana dedicates the Okavango Delta conservation and tourism. Thus, the conflict in the Cubango-Okavango Region is often depicted as taking place mainly at the level of nations of food production versus conservation. However, the interests of the local resource users are omitted in this representation. How do local interests interact with national development plans and associated international forces of land use change in order to guarantee their agricultural production and livelihoods?

The paper shows the result of an assessment of conflicts on the use of natural resources and ecosystem services perceived by stakeholders of the basin.

#### Methods

Using conflict diagnosis, the paper analyses revealed and latent ESS conflicts occurring in the CORB directly or indirectly related to water. The data consists of 80 texts of interviews conducted from 2012 to 2013 with stakeholders of 4 levels of governance (local, provincial, national and basin) in the CORB. The text material was analysed with a qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The conflict diagnosis elements coded include the ESS(s) at stake, the involved actors, the intensity of the conflict, and governance conflicts. Relationships among conflicts and among actors are investigated via network analysis, as well as links to identified governance conflicts.

#### Results

27 conflicts and 10 different actors were identified, whereby the local population and the governments were by far the most involved. We identified conflicts of local livelihoods vs. national interests in both the conservation and the exploitation case. They were characterised by corruption, the taking up of resources by elites, and the exclusion of local communities from development perspectives by officials. Thus, there is another conflict underlying the exploitation-conservation conflict in the CORB: that of the people to remain sovereign in their own resources.

**Keywords:** Angola, Botswana, irrigation, political ecology, productivism, smallholders