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Combating desertification through development projects in Namibia’s Waterberg region – state building instead of desertification reduction

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Abstract

Climate conditions and various socio-economic and structural factors have led to rangeland degradation in different parts of Namibia, especially in the communal areas. Here, a large part of the population depend on subsistence livestock farming to make a living. Against this background, five different development projects to combat desertification were implemented successively from 1991 until 2018 in the communal farming areas of the Waterberg region, mainly under the umbrella of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD): 1) Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme (SARDEP), 2) Namibia’s Programme to Combat Desertification (NAPCOD), 3) Desert Margins Programme (DMP), 4) Country Pilot Partnership Programme for Integrated Sustainable Land Management (CPP-ISLM), 5) Land Degradation Neutrality Pilot Project (LDN). These development projects are important platforms to bring into dialogue international treaties (UNCCD), international cooperation and UN agencies, Namibian ministries, extension services, consulting firms, NGOs and local communal farmers. Nevertheless, despite these numerous initiatives to combat desertification, desertification is still looming in the region. The overall research question is to what extent the development projects had an impact on rangeland management to reduce desertification. We analyse project reports, interviews with key informants from the mentioned projects and with farmers who experienced and participated in the development projects. We focus on, firstly, the projects’ conceptualisation of desertification and its causes, secondly, the projects’ measures to combat desertification and their outcome, and thirdly, the impact of the project results from a farmer perspective. Preliminary results show that the direct impact on rangeland management of communal farmers was low, but the development projects made key contributions to policies regarding rangeland management and to capacity building for people working in state entities, NGOs and consulting firms nowadays. State building and the development of the NGO sector were needed after Namibian independence in 1990.

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