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“Reconcile land system changes  
with planetary health”

## Changing grounds: community perspectives on rangeland governance and livestock management in eastern Namibia

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### Abstract

Rangelands are an essential basis for rural livelihoods in Namibia at the same time as being crucial for wildlife conservation. In communal areas, legally gazetted conservancies have become a governance system which enables communities to manage and benefit from land wildlife and natural resources. These governance changes, and others, have affected rangeland management. This study aims to explore how governance changes were perceived by the rural communities and how they affected rangeland and livestock management in eastern Namibia.

The study focuses on four communal farming areas within conservancies in two regions of Namibia. Data collection included reviewing policies and historical documents from the National Archives of Namibia, interviewing key informants from different institutions, and conducting narrative interviews with livestock managers.

Results show that livestock management practices have changed over time, which may be linked to the implementation and management of communal conservancies. The zonation of communal conservancies into exclusive wildlife, tourism, and grazing zones impacts livestock mobility, and has often been delineated without sufficient consultation with livestock managers. Enforcement of zonation is variable, allowing for variable access to zones, impacting grazing land availability for livestock. Illegal fencing has proven to have the biggest impact on rangeland use in the study areas in Omaheke, by being very exclusive for a large part of the rural households. The identified systems influence livestock management, especially during droughts when the rangeland governance systems reduces the ability of herders to find sufficient grazing land and water for livestock.

This study highlights the need to ensure that communities are meaningfully involved and well-informed in decision-making processes regarding land use, zoning, and natural resource management. Strengthening cooperation between traditional leaders, communities, conservancies, and government institutions can support more sustainable rangeland and livestock management while enabling alternative livelihoods and conservation efforts.

**Keywords:** Conservancy, decision-making, governance, historical, livestock, narrative interviews, rangeland

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