Tropentag, September 10-12, 2025, hybrid conference

"Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health"

Enhancing livestock husbandry and rural livelihoods through peer-to-peer information access: A transdisciplinary approach in communal areas of Namibia

Mareike Aufderheide-Voigts[1], Mpule Kamwi[2], Rufo Roba Halakhe[3], Maria Restrepo[4], Brigitte Kaufmann[5]

[1] *Namibia Nature Foundation, Sustainable Agriculture, Namibia*
[2] *Namibia Nature Foundation, Sustainable Agriculture, Namibia*
[3] *German Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL), Germany*
[4] *German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL), Germany*
[5] *German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL), Germany*

Abstract

In vast rural areas of Namibia, livestock keepers lack access to formal support structures for capacity building, livestock health care, and market facilitation, which constrains livestock productivity and undermines rural livelihoods. Although relevant information is available digitally, access remains limited due to technological, skills-related, infrastructural, and language barriers. The InfoRange project supports peer-to-peer information access through Voluntary Information Facilitators (VIFs), equipped with digital tools and trained to access and share relevant information. This study aims to evaluate how peer-to-peer information facilitation improves access and supports decision-making among communities.

The study operates in three communal conservancies and one constituency in Kavango East and Omaheke Regions. Using a participatory action research (PAR) approach, four VIFs, selected jointly by community representatives and researchers, were trained in online information search, engaging formal support networks (e.g. government representatives and veterinarians), and sharing information in a suitable format and language.

Each VIF reaches out to the community at least twice a week, mostly joining community gatherings, but also visiting individual villages. They documented requests and the respective answers obtained from online searches. 15 follow-up interviews were done with selected community members to understand clarity, applicability, and impact of received information. Iterative reflection cycles between VIFs and researchers supported ongoing learning and adaptation.

Documentation from these engagements shows that focal interests of male community members were livestock health and rangeland management with some interest in animal welfare, livestock related regulations and livestock feeding. Focal interests depended on gender and age. Clarity of the information provided depended on the education level of the inquirer, on the information format and also on whether contextually relevant explanations, solutions or suggestions were found in the internet. Contextual relevance of information depended largely on the topics, with livestock health showing high relevance, but information on more complex management areas, such as rangeland management only being broadly applicable.

Contact Address: Mareike Aufderheide-Voigts, Namibia Nature Foundation, Sustainable Agriculture, Farm krumhuk, Windhoek, Namibia, e-mail: mvoigts@nnf.org.na

Peer-to-peer information facilitation by trusted community members can bridge critical information gaps and grant access to an additional knowledge source that can serve local knowledge needs . While challenges related to connectivity and access to hardware persist, the model shows potential sustainability and scalability.

Keywords: Community, information access, livestock, Namibia, peer-to-peer, rangeland, transdisciplinary