

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

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## Background

- Rangelands constitute a critical resource for sustaining both rural livelihoods and wildlife
- The main source of income in Kavango East are farming activities, particularly crop cultivation and livestock husbandry
- Communal rangeland governance has shifted from customary systems to more formalized policies and conservancy structures
- The case study is based in Muduva Nyangana and George Mukoya Conservancy which were registered in 2005

## Conclusion

- Institutional factors: Conservancy zoning and weakened traditional authority have reshaped grazing practices
  - Conservancy zoning has reduced grazing land access
  - Weakened governance leads to less control over wildfires, which impact grazing availability
- Unclear residential and crop land allocation reduces available grazing land
- Environmental factors: Consecutive wildfires and shifting rainfall patterns are degrading pastures and making fodder availability less predictable

## Aim

- Examine how governance changes in communal rangelands affect grazing practices, community perceptions, and stakeholder involvement
  - Capture and analyze the lived experiences of community members in relation to rangeland management

## Results

### Introduction of the conservancy: Governance changes

- Conservancies determine exclusive wildlife, farming and residential zones
- Conservancies are governed by a Conservancy Management Committee (CMC), one member of the traditional authority (TA) participates in meetings but does not have voting rights
- Planned grazing was introduced, but is not followed
- Introduction of compensation schemes for damage by big game (e.g. elephants, lions, buffalos), however, not by small species (e.g. antelopes)
- Restriction in utilization of natural resources (e.g. harvesting thatch grass)
- Hunting by community members is banned, but game meat is distributed according to quotas assigned by the Namibian Government

### Perception of the community of conservancy-related changes

- Weakened Traditional Authority (TA) – Responsibilities shifted from TA to the Conservancies, and aren't always clear
  - Wildfire management responsibilities are unclear and firefighting is disorganized
  - Utilization of natural resources, earlier regulated by TA now by CMC
- Increased wildlife damage (crop raids, livestock predation)
- Many respondents perceive little to no benefits
  - However, increased water availability through CMC-funded boreholes is rarely acknowledged by community members

### Conservancy independent factors

- Population growth drives expansion of cropland and livestock numbers
- Illegal fencing of land reduces grazing availability
- Fewer open pans with water available, due to reduced rainfall, reducing grazing land suitability

### Recommendations

- Strengthen TA–CMC collaboration for clearer responsibilities and better wildfire management.
- Expand compensation to include crop damage from antelope species (especially kudus)
- Integrate diverse stakeholders in land use-planning and ensure functional governance
- Recognize local perspectives by fostering respectful dialogue between communities, conservancies, and government.

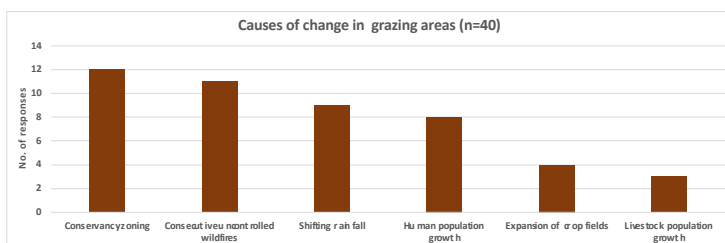


Figure 5: Respondents' perceptions about the causes of change in the rangeland



Figure 1 & 2: Typical woody rangeland and cattle husbandry in the study area



Figure 3 & 4: Signboard of the Muduva Nyangana Conservancy and typical harvested crop field with residues as livestock feed

## Study area

- Muduva Nyangana Conservancy, Kavango East
- Sub-tropical rangelands and forest
- Rainfall: 500 mm annually
- Unimodal rainy season

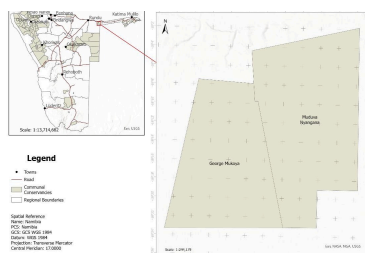


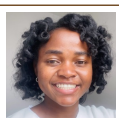
Figure 6: Study area conservancies of George Mukoya and Muduva Nyangana  
Source: Esri, NASA, NOAA USGS, 2025

## Methodology

- Participant observations
- Focus Group Discussion (n=4)
- Narrative Interviews (n=40): Herders, elders, and long-term residents who have been in the community from at least 10 years before conservancy establishment



Figure 7: FGD in Muduva Nyangana Conservancy



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