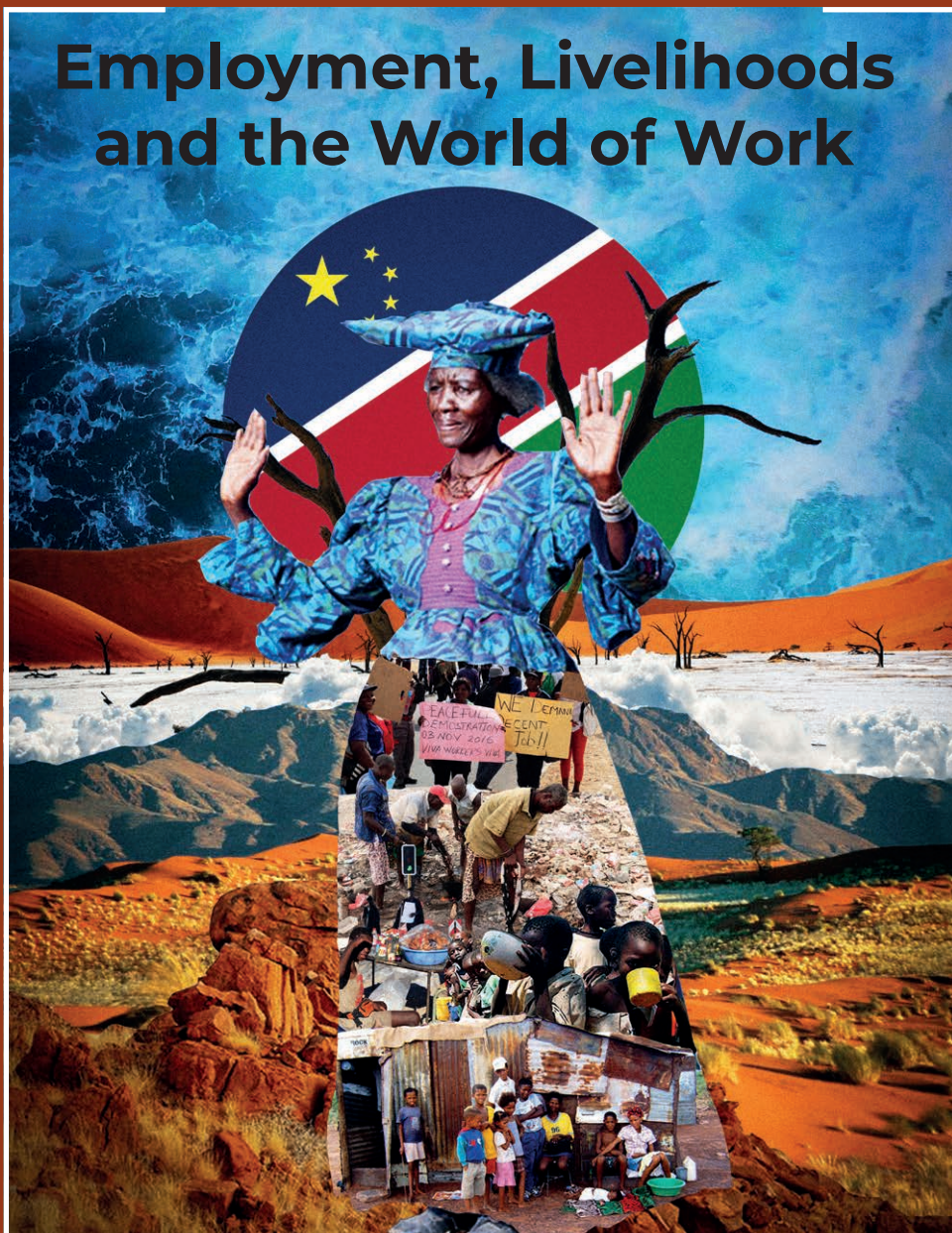


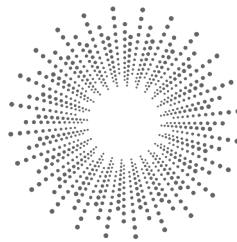
Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work



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Case Study

Livelihood and Living Conditions of a Female Communal Farmer

Claudius Riruako

Introduction

This case study examines the experiences of Albertina (not her real name), a communal farmer in Namibia's Ohangwena Region, as she navigates the challenges and opportunities of agricultural practices and family livelihoods in a communal setting. It explores her background, the nature of her farming activities, the obstacles she faces, and the innovative strategies she employs to achieve sustainable agriculture.

Subsistence farming

Albertina, who is 34, and her husband Shiwedha, 47, are communal farmers in the village of Ohalushi, Ohangwena Region. Although the region is known for mixed farming, the family only grows crops, as they do not have cattle. They own five chickens. They are totally dependent on rain-fed agriculture as they do not have the irrigation infrastructure or water for irrigation. They grow crops like *mahangu* (millet) and beans which they fertilise with cattle manure. The



Photo: Dirk Haarmann

farming is completely organic for they do not use fertilisers or any chemicals on the crops. They do not have tractors so they use a donkey for ploughing. The horticultural growth cycle takes three to five months.

Employment and income

She starts work in their fields at six in the morning and continues until around one in the afternoon. Her main responsibilities include sowing, weeding, harvesting, storing of *mahangu* seeds, and pounding of *mahangu*. This she does in addition to her domestic work in the house that includes cleaning, cooking and child care. Her husband is responsible for clearing the land. They share the tasks of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. When they get sufficient rainfall, they harvest enough beans (they sell only if they are fresh) so they pack them into small portions for sale.

Albertina also earns a small and fluctuating income of between N\$ 50 to N\$100 per day from the sale of traditional whisky (*ombike*) that she brews. Her husband, works as a casual worker for a construction company where he digs trenches. His work is sporadic. If he manages to work for a full week, he earns around N\$200 per week. Her son is currently unemployed, but during the rain season he works as a cattle herder for a neighbour where he receives N\$200 per month.

Education

Due to pregnancy, Albertina dropped out of school in Grade 8. She did not receive a second chance to continue her education. Her husband lacks any formal qualifications or vocational training. This makes it difficult for him to find a permanent job.

Albertina has three children who have all attended the local primary school, and her two youngest children are still there. Her eldest son failed Grade 11 in 2022 and was unable to proceed to Grade 12 or to university. The family's financial situation prevents them from sending him to a vocational training centre to acquire additional skills.

Challenges Faced

Land availability and soil quality

The family resides in a communal area where land is allocated by the local chief. Due to high demand, the family could only access a small piece of land with a low soil quality. Due to overploughing, the soil has lost nutrient content and fertility.

Farmers like Albertina struggle to find suitable land and must learn more about soil management to sustain their families. They have not accessed fertilisers, agricultural training or agricultural extension services to assist

them to adopt agricultural practices that lead to greater crop yields and improved soil quality.

Land titles

The land belongs to the community and is administered by local headmen and chiefs. Lack of formal land titles in communal systems hinders them from securing land. The question of title deeds causes disputes in the community and with the government. The size and quality of land procured depends on the proximity to the headman and the chiefs, for they decide if a farmer can occupy a piece of land or not. The current land they occupy was given in her husband's name. Albertina does not independently have access to land.

Climate change

The family is vulnerable to climate variability, all the more so to that brought about by climate change. The area has been getting dryer. Protracted droughts have devastating effects on rain-fed agriculture. During 2022–2023, they did not harvest anything at all because their crops failed as a result of the drought.

Water scarcity

Limited access to water is a challenge. Farmers rely on communal boreholes, which may not provide reliable water

for crop irrigation. This limits crop yields and the types of crops they can produce, and also results in lower crop yields. The water extracted from the borehole is only for animals and for domestic use like cooking, cleaning and bathing, but not for irrigation.

Access to finance

The limited availability and high costs of seeds and farming inputs further impact farmers' productivity and profitability. Their limited financial resources restrict their ability to invest in farming equipment and modern farming techniques.

Infrastructure and services

The family of six resides in a traditional a two-bedroomed hut with no running water or sanitation. Inadequate road infrastructure limits their capacity to access markets and farming inputs. The family travels 20 kilometres to access the nearest healthcare facility which, like other public healthcare facilities, is overcrowded and understaffed.

Nutrition

The family's nutrition is marginal. They mostly eat *mahangu* (millet) porridge with wild spinach, which is one of the most affordable meals. Foods like meat and rice are more expensive options and rare treats they have once

or twice a month. Despite being food producers, Albertina and her family only eat once a day. The daily meal is served at night. During the day, children collect *eenyadi* (indigenous berries) to eat. They do not have enough fertile land, skills, fertilisers, quality seeds, skills or farming equipment to increase crop yields and food production.

Water and sanitation

The family collects water from a community tap 500 meters away from the home. Due to limited access to clean, potable water, they preserve it for drinking, cooking, laundry and bathing. The family has no indoor plumbing and an outdoor shack is used as a bathing facility. The house has no running water. They decant water from the collection drum into the wash basins. They have no ablution facilities, and use the nearby bushes to relieve themselves.

Conclusion

The case study of Albertina and her family in Ohalushi highlights the primary livelihood issues that Namibians living in rural areas encounter. Inadequate living conditions – insufficient nutrition, poor housing and sanitation, and many more – cause health risks and reduce the family’s general well-being. Access to basic services and job opportunities is further hampered by a lack of affordable educational options in rural areas.