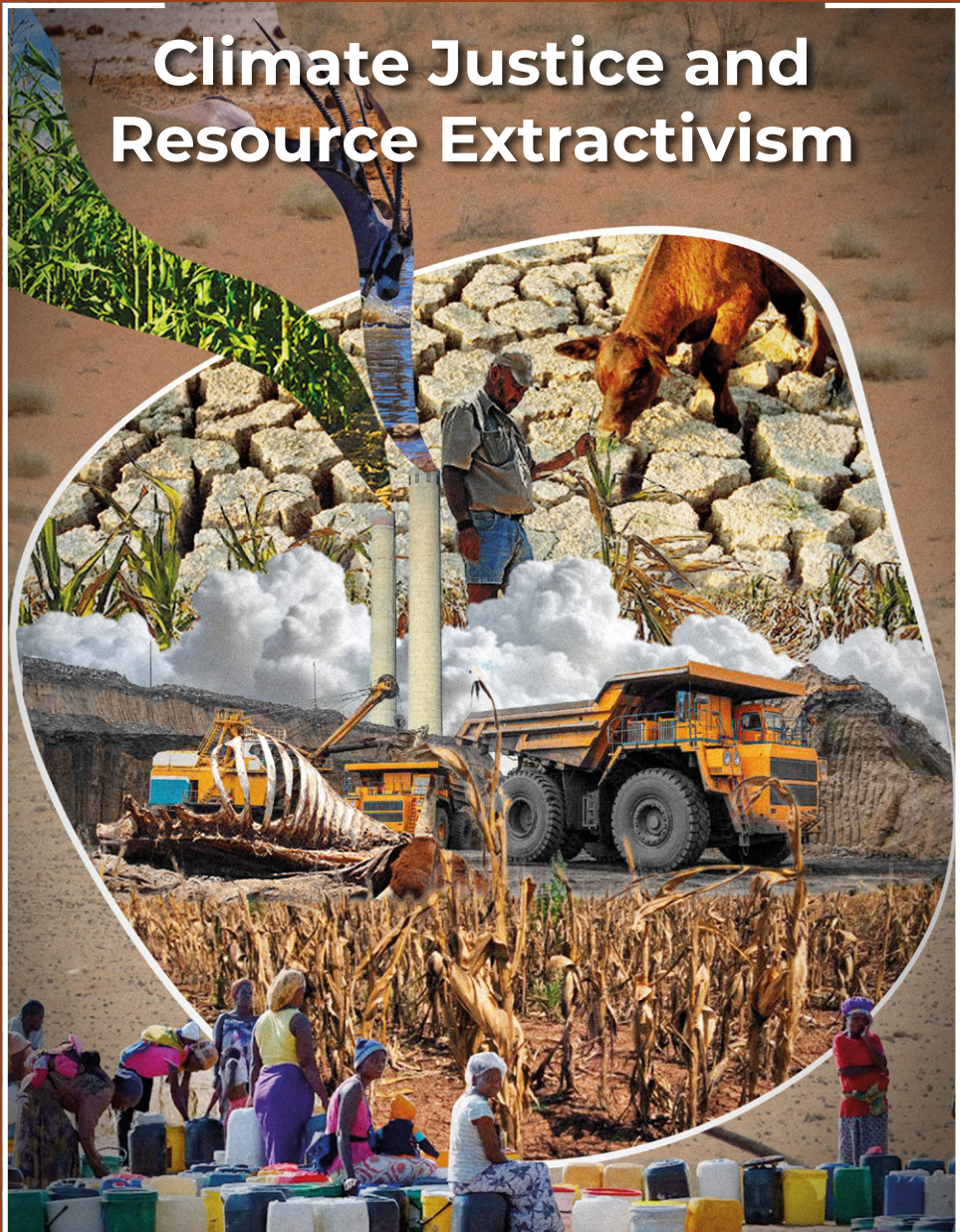


Climate Justice and Resource Extractivism



Social Justice amidst Climate Change in Namibia's Community-based Natural Resources Management Programme

Selma Lendelvo and Sian Sullivan

Introduction

This case study outlines the intersections of social justice and climate change as they relate to the Community-based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programme in Namibia. In so doing, it outlines the challenges faced by diverse communities dwelling in Namibia's remaining communal lands in fully benefiting from natural resources in these areas. It also discusses the

implications of these challenges for the well-being and development of these communities and offers recommendations to improve the efficacy of the CBNRM programme, focusing in particular on addressing existing barriers amidst the effects of climate change and the limitations imposed by inequalities in the sector. To provide some context for the severity of this issue, in May 2024 Namibia joined southern African countries such



Dug-out springs at Otjizeka / Xoriblgams in Omatendeka Conservancy, Kunene Region

Source Sian Sullivan

as Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe in declaring a state of emergency due to drought considered to be associated with regional climate change (Angula, 2024).

The CBNRM programme in Namibia was established to empower rural community members living on communal land by granting them rights to manage and benefit from wildlife and other natural resources. Initiated through the Nature Conservation Amendment Act (5 of 1996), which provided a “conservancy amendment” to the Nature Conservation Ordinance 4 of 1975, the programme primarily targets Namibian communal lands, as defined under the Communal Land Reform Act (5 of 2002), where autochthonous, as opposed to settler, Namibians reside.

This law enables the formation of locally led institutions, known as conservancies, which are governed by elected community members. These conservancies are officially recognised and authorised by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT). The programme aims to promote sustainable resource management, enhance livelihoods, and support conservation efforts by ensuring that local communities directly benefit from their natural surroundings.

Background to CBNRM

Over the years, conservancies have become vital partners of the Namibian government in conservation efforts, significantly contributing to landscape protection, connectivity, and the promotion of ecosystems, key species, and genetic diversity. Bollig (2016) refers to Namibia’s community conservation programme as the new commons, highlighting the devolution of rights over natural resources, especially for wildlife management. This programme empowers communities to make some decisions about utilisation, protection, investments, and the nature and distribution of benefits derived from their natural resources.

The CBNRM programme in communal areas has proven to be a crucial vehicle for enhancing economic development in rural Namibia through wildlife conservation and tourism, while promoting community participation (Bollig, 2016; Mosimane & Silva, 2014; Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO), 2021). This success can be attributed to the exponential growth of the programme since the 1996 amendment of the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975. The former Ministry of Environment and Tourism gazetted the first four conservancies in Namibia in 1998: Nyae Nyae Conservancy in Otjozondjupa Region; Salambala Conservancy in Zambezi

Region (then Caprivi Region); and Torra Conservancy and †Khoadi-Hôas Conservancy in Kunene Region. By 2022, there were 86 community-based conservation institutions, including 84 conservancies and two community conservation associations (see Figure 1). These institutions cover 58.7% of the communal areas in Namibia, or 20% of the country's total surface area (MEFT/NACSO, 2023).

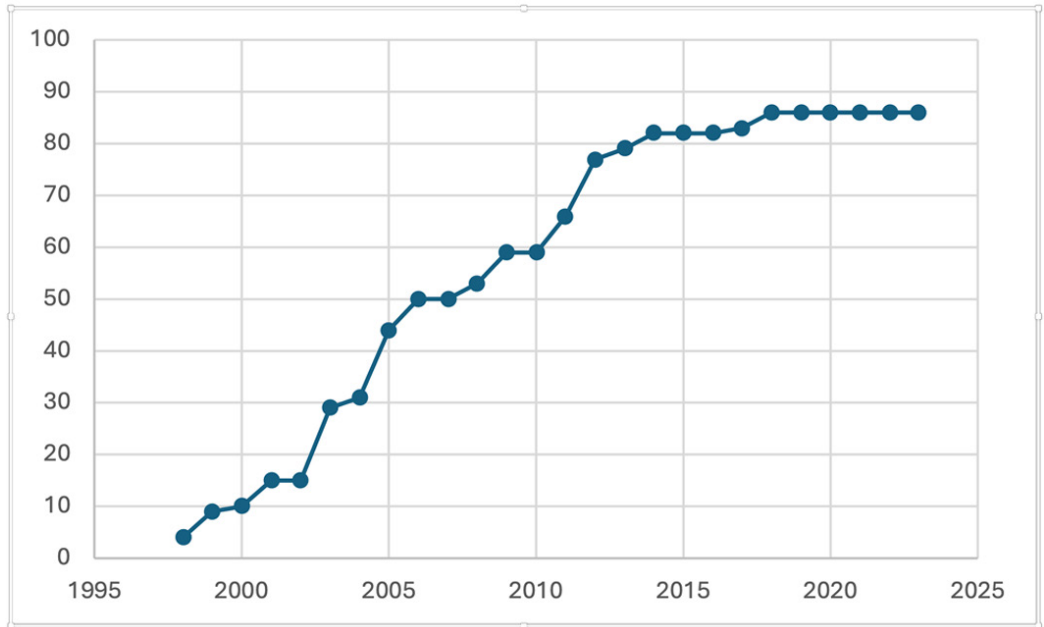
Conservancies and conservation associations are community-led, with management committees elected in accordance with their constitutions and the standard operating procedures determined by the MEFT. In collaboration with NACSO, the MEFT has established a coordinated support system to strengthen these institutions' capacity to manage their natural resources with a view to sustainable development. Critical support areas provided by the government, NGOs, and other partners fall into three categories: institutional development; natural resources management; and business, enterprise and livelihoods development.

Governance structures of conservancies and associations have been strengthened over the years, demonstrated by the increasing number of conservancies complying with MEFT standard operating procedures. For example, more conservancies and

associations are able to hold annual general meetings, a requirement for good governance that ensures the involvement of members in decision-making and amplifies their voices. Prudent financial management of the conservancies and associations is also evident, with an increasing number presenting annual financial reports. Additionally, the CBNRM programme continues to uphold gender equality within the management of natural resources. Over a third of the members of management committees are women (34%), and 19% of the conservancies and associations are led by female chairpersons (MEFT/NACSO, 2023).

Since the enactment of the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996, significant progress has been made in developing various conservation initiatives and enterprises within conservancies aimed at community empowerment and development. Over 80% of these institutions have implemented effective community-level monitoring tools for natural resources. These include the Event Book system, game management and zonation plans, harvesting quotas, game guards, and annual game counts. Additionally, the Concession Policy, applied since 2007, allows conservancies to participate in tourism concessions within neighbouring protected areas, further integrating conservation and economic development.

Figure 1 *Trend in conservancy/association establishment in Namibia (1998–2022)*



Source: MEFT/NACSO (2023)

A major source of income for community members in these areas is employment from joint-venture tourism, conservancies/associations, conservation hunting, and member benefits. According to MEFT/NACSO (2023), in 2022, a total of N\$75 million was paid to community members as salaries or allowances, and approximately 300 000 kg of game meat was distributed. The same

report indicated that N\$19 million was invested in the sector during 2022 in the form of cash benefits, community development and social projects.

In addition to these conservation efforts, several economic development initiatives have also been advanced. The MEFT and NACSO detailed this progress in their Annual Report for 2022, as illustrated below.

Summary of conservation and tourism developments directly benefitting local communities in conservancies/associations



Source: (MEFT/NACSO, 2023)

Challenges within the CBNRM Sector

Despite the positive intentions of the CBNRM programme, communities living in communal land areas (as defined by the Communal Land Reform Act of 2002) face several challenges that hinder their ability to benefit fully from wildlife, forestry and other natural resources. A significant challenge is low capacity amongst community members, many of whom have limited levels of education and lack opportunities for enhancing their skills and capacity, which prevents effective resource management and value addition. Several business interventions owned by the local communities

struggle to sustain themselves because of this limited capacity, meaning that it is external private sector investors that tend to profit more from enterprises in communal areas (Schneegg & Kiaka, 2018; Kalvelage et al., 2020; Hewitson & Sullivan, 2021; Sullivan, 2023).

The challenge of low capacity-building is multifaceted and deeply rooted in historical, social, and economic contexts. Many community members have limited access to quality education, which hinders their ability to engage effectively in resource management activities. The lack of education translates into a deficiency in necessary skills for managing and

adding value to natural resources. This challenge is further compounded by the limited availability of training programmes aimed at enhancing the skills and building the capacity of these communities. Without targeted efforts to improve education and training, the full potential of these communities to manage and benefit from their natural resources remains untapped. In response to this concern, multiple training initiatives have been part of the CBNRM programme, facilitated by the government and associated NGOs. However, concern has been expressed that these trainings initiatives have not led to higher incomes. As a result, trained individuals have left conservancy committees and management positions for better job opportunities elsewhere. This makes the issue of capacity-building in communal conservancies and other related local institutions all the more complex.

In addition, access to financial resources is another major barrier. Without sufficient capital, communities cannot invest in the necessary infrastructure, technology, or training programmes, limiting their potential for economic development. Additionally, Namibia's arid climate exacerbates resource limitations, reducing the diversification of livelihoods that is primarily dependent on livestock and, to some extent, crop farming. "Human-

wildlife conflict" is an additional factor impacting livelihoods in some contexts, and is also thought to be exacerbated by climate change (Lendelvo et al., 2021).

Land and resource ownership disparities constitute a significant social injustice faced by communities. Vast tracts of productive land and other valuable resources are state-owned, which limits direct and significant economic benefits accruing to rural communities. Moreover, over the years, communal conservancies in Namibia have been highly dependent on donor funding, with extensive technical support from the government and NGOs (Sullivan, 2002; Lendelvo et al., in press). While donor support has been beneficial, it has created a challenge for self-reliance among these communities. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this vulnerability, as the system nearly collapsed due to high dependence on external support (Lendelvo et al., 2020).

Infrastructural development is another significant challenge that affects the efficacy of the CBNRM programme. Many rural areas in Namibia suffer from inadequate infrastructure, including poor road networks, limited market access, and insufficient healthcare and educational facilities. These infrastructural deficiencies impede economic activities and limit access to essential

services, thereby restricting the overall development of these communities. Improving infrastructure is crucial for facilitating better market access, enhancing service delivery, and supporting economic activities that can drive community development.

The availability of capital is a critical issue for the success of the CBNRM programme. Many community members lack access to financial resources, which limits their ability to invest in necessary infrastructure, technology, and training programmes. This lack of capital prevents communities from fully realising the economic potential of their natural resources. Establishing financial mechanisms such as microfinance programmes, grants, and investment funds can provide communities with the capital they need to invest in sustainable development initiatives.

Trophy hunting is a traditional financial support mechanism for communal conservancies in Namibia. This industry, which involves hunting wildlife for trophies sold to tourists, has generated substantial revenue for communities. However, it is dominated by foreign businesspeople, with little capacity being transferred to native Namibians (Koot 2019; Kalvelage et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). This exclusivity limits the participation of local people in the lucrative trophy hunting

business, perpetuating dependency on wealthier, resource-rich individuals. Facilitating the inclusion of native Namibians in the trophy hunting industry by providing training, financial support, and opportunities to enter and compete in this business may help reduce economic disparities and promote more equitable development, although significant concerns also exist regarding the impacts of such hunting on some CITES-listed species, as well as animal welfare more broadly and species social structures.

The lack of local participation in trophy hunting restricts economic opportunities for native Namibians and perpetuates reliance on external entities. Facilitating the inclusion of native Namibians in the trophy hunting industry by providing training, financial support, and opportunities to enter and compete in this business can help reduce economic disparities and promote more equitable development. At the same time, structural circumstances in which trophy hunting businesses tend to be based on or led from land acquired through settler colonialism is proving a significant barrier to such inclusion.

Climate Change and Environmental Constraints: Implications and Impact

Namibia's arid climate presents significant challenges for the CBNRM

programme. Water scarcity is the norm, and frequent droughts exacerbate resource limitations and reduce options for the diversification of livelihoods. Most communities primarily depend on livestock farming, with some engaging in crop farming. However, the limited availability of water and other natural resources coupled with limited capacities restricts the ability of these communities to diversify their livelihoods. Developing and promoting climate resilience strategies, including water conservation, drought-resistant crops, and sustainable land management practices, are essential for mitigating the impacts of climate change on these communities.

The dependence on narrow livelihood activities also increases the vulnerability of these communities to environmental and economic shocks. Most communities primarily rely on livestock farming, with some engaging in crop farming. However, the limited availability of water and other natural resources restricts their ability to diversify their livelihoods, making them more susceptible to the impacts of climate change and other environmental challenges. The development and promotion of climate resilience strategies, including water conservation, drought-resistant crops, and sustainable land management practices, are essential for mitigating these impacts and promoting sustainable development.

Inadequate infrastructure, education, and financial resources further compound the challenges faced by these communities. Poor infrastructure limits market access and restricts economic opportunities, while inadequate education and training prevent effective resource management and value addition. The lack of financial resources prevents communities from investing in essential infrastructure, technology, and training programmes, limiting their potential for economic development. Establishing financial mechanisms such as microfinance programmes, grants, and investment funds can provide communities with the capital they need to invest in sustainable development initiatives.

The high dependency on donor funding also renders communal conservancies vulnerable to external shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this vulnerability, as the system nearly collapsed due to high dependence on external support. Promoting self-reliance by developing strategies to reduce dependency on donor funding is vital. This includes fostering local entrepreneurship, improving financial management skills, and creating sustainable income streams within the communities.

Conclusions

Rural communal communities in conservancies face significant challenges in fully benefiting from the CBNRM programme, which are rooted in historical, social, and economic contexts. The colonial legacy and historical injustices have left many native Namibians with limited access to productive land, valuable resources, and quality education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. These historical factors have led to persistently low income levels among rural communities, hindering their ability to fully engage in and benefit from wildlife management and tourism-based economic activities. Poverty in rural Namibia, including within the CBNRM programme, is extreme and possibly worsening. The sustainability of the CBNRM programme is a major concern that needs urgent attention, especially given the widespread poverty and declining wildlife populations in rural areas. To achieve social justice and foster sustainable development amidst climate change impacts, Namibia must undertake significant reforms.

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