

A digest of information on key aspects of Kunene and Erongo's geography

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Namibia has four very large and arid regions which set them apart in various ways from the rest of the country: Kunene and Erongo in the west and Karas and Hardap in the south. Rainfall in Kunene and Erongo is usually both low ([average_rainfall.jpg](#)) and extremely variable ([rainfall_variation.jpg](#)) which means that years of abundant rain are often followed by extreme dry conditions. As a result of low rainfall, vegetation is generally sparse, with few trees and a thin covering of grass ([vegetation_types.jpg](#)). Plant cover varies in relation to rainfall, and so the eastern parts of Erongo and Kunene have more trees and grass than the western, coastal areas.

Grass production is highly dependant on rainfall, and so livestock and other animals suffer when rains fail. Farming is thus a difficult enterprise and livestock densities are low in most areas as a result of the low productivity of farm land ([carrying_capacity.jpg](#)). One feature that does however make livestock farming easier is the absence of fences, which means that both domestic and wild animals can move widely in many places, migrating from areas of poor grazing to other places with more abundant pastures. Farming with cattle and goats predominates, and the highest concentration of these animals is in northern Kunene where herds and flocks are often moved around between distant pastures ([livestock_densities.jpg](#)).

The absence of fences is therefore an important asset for livestock production, but it also gives visitors to the regions a sense of freedom and wildness, which they appreciate. The absence of people ([density_of_people.jpg](#)) adds more to the wilderness value of many areas. This is one of many comparative advantages that are special to Kunene and Erongo, and it is important that members of the Communal Land Board have a full appreciation of these advantages.

The comparative advantages of Kunene and Erongo

Other than the vast expanses of open land, the two regions have a great number of other assets. Obvious ones are such attractions as the Namib Desert and its dunes, the Brandberg, Spitzkoppe and rock art, especially at Twyfelfontein, the Petrified Forest, the lagoon at Walvis Bay, and abundant wildlife, including the famous desert elephants and fur seals.

Visitors are also attracted by cultural features, such as the Ovahimba people and the German character of Swakopmund. The two regions offer rugged and beautiful scenery, since Kunene and Erongo straddle the coastal plains and the escarpment ([topography.jpg](#)). In addition, there are the mountains of Brandberg, Spitzkoppe, the Erongos, and then spectacular and wild valleys: Marienfluss and Hartmann's valleys for example.

Kunene and Erongo are also close to Etosha and benefit from the passage of visitors to and from that well-known park. These and other assets give the two regions a combined quality that is probably unique in the world. It is also a quality that is worth a good deal of money. Although reliable statistics are not available, it is certain that Erongo and Kunene attract more tourists than any other regions in Namibia. Much employment and economic activity in

the two regions thus relies on tourism enterprises and attractions, and these also contribute substantial amounts to the national economy.

One major recent development to have contributed to the growth of the tourism industry and to have opened up new attractions for visitors is the establishment of conservancies on communal land ([conservation areas.jpg](#)). Their development followed that of conservancies on freehold farms during the 1970s when new legislation then allowed freehold farmers to make commercial use of wildlife. The same rights were extended to communal areas when legislation was changed with the passing of the Nature Conservation Amendment Act in 1996. This gave rise to the well-known CBNRM (community-based natural resources management) programme, the success of which has earned Namibia international acclaim. Much of this success has been achieved in Kunene and Erongo, where many conservancies have developed beyond expectation.

There are now 24 communal conservancies in Kunene and Erongo covering a total of just under 60 thousand square kilometres (59,885 square kilometres), although the borders of two conservancies extend into Omusati. This is in addition to six freehold conservancies of which 209 farms are members.

Much of the income from communal conservancies, which is distributed among its members, comes from trophy hunting and especially tourism. This is income earned from visitors who stay in campsites and lodges in the conservancies. Overall incomes for conservancies are now impressive, both for the amounts of money generated and the rate at which incomes have increased. For example, the total amount of income among the eight most successful conservancies rose over from just under N\$10,000 in 1997 to over N\$6 million in 2005, a period of less than 10 years ([income from conservancies.jpg](#)).

In summary, Kunene and Erongo have witnessed and benefited from a massive growth in tourism. Land values have increased, and wildlife now has much greater commercial value than before. Many freehold farms, even those not within commercial conservancies, offer tourist accommodation and trophy hunting, as well as selling both venison and live animals. Again statistics are not available, but it is clear wildlife and tourism now earn much more than conventional farming in Erongo and Kunene.

Aside from contributing to employment and economic welfare, conservancies also do much to safeguard and protect wildlife and other important animals and plants. By abutting and adding to the extensive areas of national parks, the conservancies create 'corridors of protection' through which animals can more safely ([landuses.jpg](#)). Environmental conservation in Erongo and Kunene is also of special importance because these two regions have more endemic animals and plants than anywhere else in Namibia ([endemism.jpg](#)). These are organisms that occur no where else in world, and everyone in Namibia, especially in Kunene and Erongo, therefore has a responsibility to protect these endemic species.





