

# Observations on farming, rural economics and associated aspects in southern Kunene Province, Angola

John Mendelsohn  
(RAISON – Research & Information Services of Namibia)

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## **Introduction**

The Namibian Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) proposes a project to improve rangeland conditions in the northern communal areas (NCA). It is further assumed that this will lead to improved production of livestock and therefore livelihoods of farmers. Since it is known that some NCA livestock owners use rangelands in southern Angola and that cross-border trade has an impact on the economy of the NCA, it was considered useful that an understanding be obtained of farming and rural economies in southern Angola. The work reported here attempts to add to that understanding.

Seven days were spent in the southern areas of Kunene Province. Details of my itinerary and activities are provided in Figure 1 and Appendix 1. In addition to meeting officials of the provincial departments of agriculture and veterinary services, I spent much of the time traveling and interviewing farmers to gain perspectives on farming methods, household incomes, movements by people and livestock and the area's physical and social geography.

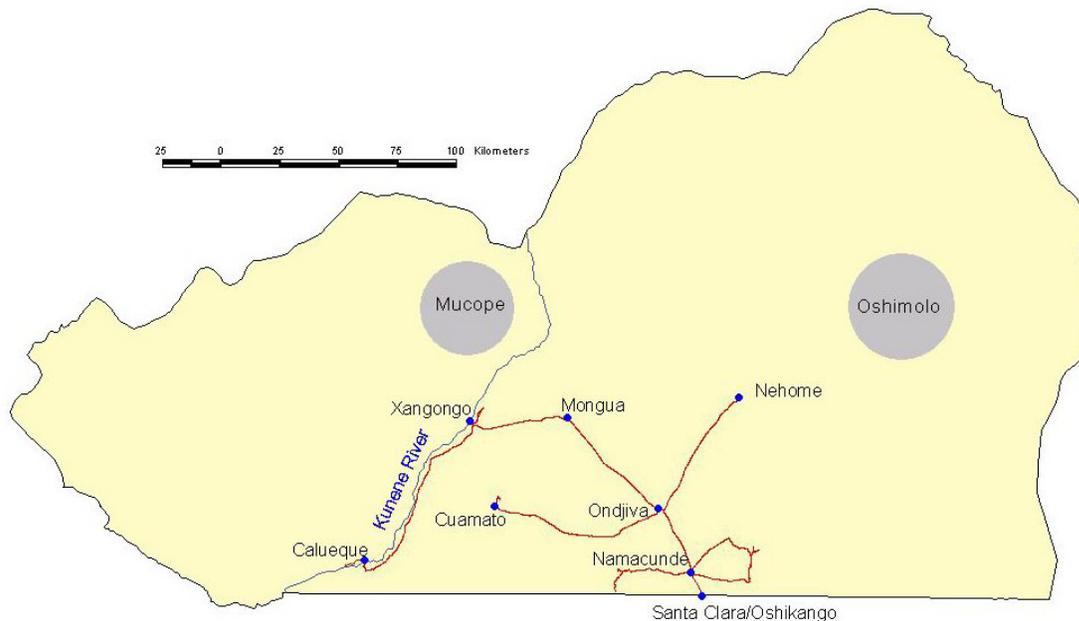
## **Aspects of the physical environment**

The area described here extends north about 80 kilometres from the international border between Ruacana and Katwitwi, while it is bounded by the Kunene River in the west and broad watershed between the Cuvelai drainage system and Kubango River in the east (Figure 1). The whole area is particularly flat, sloping very gently as the braided network of Cuvelai channels meander southwards into Namibia from their headwaters several hundred kilometres into Angola. These interconnected channels dominate the landscape in the west and central parts of the area, while Kalahari Sand woodlands cover the eastern zones and remain on patches of higher, sandier ground among the oshana channels.

The whole area consists of fluvial and aeolian sediments which have direct effects on the composition and structure of vegetation. Only grass grows on fluvial soils in oshanas that are often inundated, while mopane grows in those oshanas that carry water less frequently and on other clayey soils in places where water used to flow in past times. Acacias and often baobabs, mangetti and wooden bananas dominate more loamy soils which are a mix of fluvial and aeolian deposits. These are the soils used for cultivation and on which all homes are built. Broad-leafed Kalahari Sand species (*Burkea*, *Baikiaea*, Angolan teak, for example) are more evident wherever aeolian Kalahari Sand sediments predominate.

The same kinds of vegetation are found in Owambo, but what is striking in Angola is the much higher density of trees, as reflected in so many satellite images. This is largely due to fewer trees being harvested for the construction of fences and homes, but Angola's

slightly higher rainfall and less frequent frost presumably also contributes to tree growth. A further conspicuous difference from the Namibian part of the Cuvelai is the much higher degree of patchiness and mixing of vegetation, which means that there is a higher diversity of trees (and doubtless other plants) in most areas of Angola's Cuvelai.<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 1. Kunene Province, routes covered during this study and places mentioned in the text.*

### **Aspects of land use and socio-economy**

The most impressive difference between the Namibian and Angolan Cuvelai is in the much smaller number of homesteads and people in Angola. Large expanses of unfenced bush remain in most areas (this can be seen in the high-resolution images in Google Earth). Of course, there are also significant differences in population density within southern Kunene Province. For example, there are more homes close to major roads and the Namibian border, while very few people live in the eastern Kalahari Sand woodlands.

Another difference between the two areas is that, on average, Angolan properties are much larger, and less variable in size than Namibian ones. Most Angolan properties thus have bigger areas cleared for cultivation and also have larger areas of enclosed grazing which can be used once commonage pastures are depleted.<sup>2</sup> Most Angolan farms are

<sup>1</sup> The only area in Namibia with the same kind of patchiness and diversity is in western Ohangwena, which is also where the density of rural homes is highest.

<sup>2</sup> The variance in size and great number of small properties in Namibia is due to several factors. The first is that property size varies according to land availability. Thus, those established first in open, unsettled areas are the largest properties, while people settling later are reduced to having successively smaller farms. Secondly, people often prefer to live near public services and can therefore only occupy small plots that remain in densely populated zones around towns and public roads. Third, widows are often

fenced with palisades of trees or brush, whereas Namibian properties (*omapyra*) are increasingly fenced with wire or have no fences.

The great majority of rural homes in southern Kunene Province are obviously very poor, at least compared to most rural homes immediately across the border in Namibia. The concept 'poor' is used here in the sense that most incomes are from subsistence sources (farming, and hunting and gathering). Very few homes therefore have cash incomes of any size, and I would estimate that an average of 80% of all income is in-kind with the remaining 20% as cash. On the Namibian side of the border, these average proportions would be reversed to about 90% as cash and 10% as in-kind income from farming.<sup>3</sup>

As tangible evidence of a lack of cash in Angola, less than 10% of homes have any structures built with cash (buildings of bricks or corrugated sheeting), most homes have never been visited by cars (since there are no 'two-lane' tracks leading to them), most people wear clothes that are obviously old, and many homes are in a state of physical disrepair and decline. These conditions hold in most areas I visited and certainly in areas beyond 10 or so kilometres of major towns and the Namibian border. Indeed, it was only in areas close to towns and the border that obvious indications of cash resources were seen.

I was also struck by the significant absence of men in rural areas, especially men of productive, working ages. During three day-long excursions I encountered no more than three or four men each day, whereas dozens of women and children were seen each day. While many men died in the Angolan civil and Namibian liberation wars, the main reason for men being absent from rural areas is that most have left in search of jobs and business opportunities in both Angolan and Namibian towns.

The only major towns are Ondjiva, Xangongo, Santa Clara, Nacamunde, Mongua and Calueque, listed in order of decreasing size. I estimate the population of Ondjiva as between 15 and 20 thousand. Other, smaller villages in the area each consist of a few shops, perhaps a school and the ruins of one or two buildings built before independence. Numerous informal shops - known as *janela aberta* (open window) in Angola and as *cuca* shops or *kambashus* in Namibia - are found in small clusters throughout the area. The great majority are built entirely of poles and thatch and do not have the names or advertisements that characterize equivalent businesses in Namibia, which are generally also built of brick and/or corrugated sheets.

Most people belong to one of two ethnic groups: Uukwanyama in the east and central areas of southern Kunene and Mbandya in the west. Uukwanyama people are the

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'accommodated' on small properties because relatives take over their late husbands' properties or because it is felt that single, elderly women are unable to manage large properties.

<sup>3</sup> It should be stressed that I am referring to average incomes and average levels of poverty. There are, of course, very many poor homes in Owambo, especially in remote areas of eastern Ohangwena and eastern Oshikoto where many households function in a very similar way to the majority seen in southern Kunene Province.

predominant group in Ohangwena in Namibia, while the Okalongo area in Namibia is also home to approximately two thousand Mbandya families.

A significant, but unknown number of commercial ranches (*fazendas*) are being established in southern Kunene Province. The farms should produce beef for markets in major Angolan cities. Each farm covers several thousand hectares.

### **Crop farming**

Methods and approaches to crop production are essentially the same as those in Owambo. Millet (*masangu*) is the dominant cereal and staple crop, while smaller areas are used to grow sorghum (*masambala*, mainly used to brew beer) and vegetables such as beans and pumpkins. Oxen are used for ploughing when these are available, but most labour is done by hand. As a result, the extent and success of crop production depends largely on the number of people a home has to work in its fields.

As in Namibia, almost no attempt is made to improve soil fertility, and few farmers ever sell their produce because surpluses are stored in large baskets. (The strategic value of these massive *iigandi* baskets cannot be overstated in view of the devastating famines that people in these areas of Angola and Namibia suffered historically.<sup>4</sup>)

### **Livestock farming**

Cattle and goats dominate livestock in southern Kunene. According to the provincial veterinary service office there are an estimated 1.1 million cattle in the whole province of Kunene, and there must be hundreds of thousands of goats. Most homes have between 10 and 20 chickens and pigs, the latter being more evident than in Owambo. Donkeys are reasonably common in the western and central Cuvelai areas, but are rare where Kalahari Sands predominate. Very few sheep were seen.

Cattle and goats graze and browse around the homes of their owners, returning each evening to their kraals. The animals drink mainly from oshanas and hand-dug wells. No herding was seen of animals grazing around their homes. Cattle lending occurs frequently. On the one hand, neighbours who do not have cattle each borrow several head from people who have large herds, the borrowers then having access to milk and draught power while the lender benefits by having his animals cared for by other people. Alternatively, widows or families lacking men will lend their cattle to be herded and cared for by male relatives in other families.

As with farm size, there appears to be much less variance in livestock ownership in Angola than in Namibia, and a far higher proportion of Angolan farmers have livestock. Thus, I estimate that about 80% of Angolan farmers have cattle, compared to only 45% of Owambo farmers. Herds are also bigger in Angola where most farmers were reported as having between 20 and 40 cattle (and a similar number of goats). Several people suggested that poor farmers have less than 20 cattle, those with average wealth have

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<sup>4</sup> See Mendelsohn, J.M., el Obeid, S & Roberts, C.S. 2000. *A profile of north-central Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek. 80 pp.

between 20 and 50 head, while rich people have over 60 cattle. Equivalent categories and numbers in Owambo would perhaps be less than 5 cattle, 5-50 head, and over 50 cattle.

As in Owambo, seasonal or transhumance grazing occurs largely within tribal areas and to distant, traditional pastures.<sup>5</sup> Those for Uukwanyama farmers are in the Oshimolo area, while the Mucope area serves cattle belonging to Mbandya farmers. However, transhumance grazing appears to be used much more regularly by Uukwanyama than Mbandya farmers. Cattle are generally moved to the distant pastures between August and January, but a number of farmers said that they would not be moving their cattle this year because they were concerned about possible unrest during the forthcoming general election on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of September.

I was unable to visit the Oshimolo or Mucope areas and could therefore not assess any aspects of husbandry. However, from what I heard and assume it is likely cattle posts are established from which several young men tend large herds that belong to a number of farmers.<sup>6</sup>

Every farmer I asked stated unequivocally that cattle and goats only sold when there was an unusual need for cash. Cattle buyers visit the area to purchase animals which are then transported to be sold in the large urban centres of Lubango, Benguela/Lobito, Huambo and Luanda. Depending on size, local prices range between N\$2,000 and N\$4,000 and the same animals are sold for at least double once they reach urban markets. However, some farmers in more remote areas are apparently unaware of these high local prices and continue to sell their animals in Namibia.<sup>7</sup>

The provincial veterinary services run an annual vaccination campaign for cattle and dogs between March and June. Dogs are vaccinated for rabies. It is estimated that between 80-90% of all cattle are vaccinated against lung sickness (CBPP), anthrax, and lumpy skin disease. Cattle that have been vaccinated are branded. Vaccinations for foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) are not provided.

### **Aspects of cross-border trade and relationships**

The epicentre of cross-border trade is at Santa Clara and Oshikango where several million US\$ may change hands in cash each day. However, there is considerable trade elsewhere along the border as indicated by the preference of rural shopkeepers to be paid in N\$. People also routinely express prices in South African Rand to distinguish the N\$ and US\$ currencies; an observation made as far north as Xangongo. Many people in southern Angola also speak Afrikaans as a result of having worked in Namibia. The greater levels of household wealth seen along the border (as mentioned above) is partly due to market opportunities offered in Namibia to Angolan farmers

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<sup>5</sup> This is why it would be rare, indeed exceptional, for cattle belonging to non-Uukwanyama or non-Mbandja owners to graze in Angola.

<sup>6</sup> This is the system used in seasonal pastures in Namibia (north of Mangetti, Ombuga grasslands, Omauni and in south-western Ongandjera, western Uukwaluudhi and western Uukolonkadhi).

<sup>7</sup> For example, a farmer told me that he hoped to earn N\$400 for his small ox while another farmer estimated that he could get N\$1,200 for a good cow in Namibia.

Veterinary officials in Ondjiva estimated that about 500 Angolan cattle are sold each year in Namibia, whereas an estimated 1,000 Namibian cattle might be sold in Angola. While the true figures may be several times these numbers, it is clear is the Angolan sales into Namibia have dropped very significantly over the past few years, doubtless because of the high prices now offered in Angola. And it is also likely that Namibian sales into Angola have increased, both as animals for immediate slaughter and to be fattened. Many of these are sold to *fazenda* ranchers who prefer Namibian cattle because of their low prices and high quality.

Everyone consulted agreed that Namibian cattle are often grazed in Angola, and everyone stated adamantly that Angolan cattle are not grazed in Namibia.<sup>8</sup> Informants were also unequivocal in saying that Angolan cattle are not vaccinated in Namibia. In addition, it was clear that many more Namibian cattle graze seasonally in the eastern Uukwanyama area, including up to Oshimolo, than in the western Mbandya area. From a survey conducted last year by veterinary officials, a total of 14,703 Namibian cattle were reported to have moved into Angola east of Santa Clara for seasonal grazing, whereas only 233 head were reported west of Santa Clara. These figures were obtained from records kept by headmen, local animal health inspectors and police officers.<sup>9</sup>

The extent of cross-border movement by both people and livestock appears to be declining, as a result of two factors. The first is the gradual tightening of controls by both Angolan and Namibian police. Secondly, ties between families living north and south of the border are weakening, which makes it harder for people to circulate freely, conduct business and to obtain rights and help for grazing from relatives. One person mentioned this as a main reason why fewer Namibian cattle now graze in southern Angola.

The proposal to construct a fence between Ruacana and Katwitwi is regarded as both important and to be firmly agreed by the Angolan and Namibian governments. However, no one could suggest when the fence would be erected. The value of the fence would be in reducing cross-border crime (which is perceived to be a major problem by both Namibian and Angolan police) and in controlling livestock disease. Present thinking by veterinary officials in Ondjiva is that there would be seven control points between Ruacana and Santa Clara, while more would be added to the east once land mines had been cleared and police posts could be established.

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<sup>8</sup> This statement must exclude the grazing of animals belonging to households located immediately next to the border, since the cattle and goats would graze daily within a few kilometres of the households both south and north of the border.

<sup>9</sup> I have no way of judging the accuracy of these figures, but they do seem reasonable. Information obtained from headmen (*sobas* in Angola) is likely to be reliable because it is traditional, mandatory practice among all Owambo people that they carry letters stating the origins and sizes of their herds. These letters must be presented when permission to graze is sought from headmen. One *soba* told me that he receives applications from about 40 migrant grazers each year.

## **Appendix 1: Itinerary, activities and terms of reference**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Activities</i>
31-Jul-08	Thursday	Drive from Windhoek to Ondangwa
1-Aug-08	Friday	Drive to Ondjiva; find accommodation and recruit guide/interpreter
2-Aug-08	Saturday	To Xangongo area, Calueque and back to Ondjiva
3-Aug-08	Sunday	Day trip to Cuamato and back to Ondjiva
4-Aug-08	Monday	Attend to administrative matters in Ondjiva and meet officials from departments of agriculture and veterinary services To Santa Clara for fuel and then north-east to Chiede and back to Ondjiva
5-Aug-08	Tuesday	
6-Aug-08	Wednesday	To Nehome and back to Ondjiva To Nacamunde and west to Ongode (Marco 16) and back to Ondjiva
7-Aug-08	Thursday	Meet officials of veterinary services in Ondjiva and drive to Ondangwa
8-Aug-08	Friday	

### **Terms of reference**

The trans-boundary field work broadly aims at obtaining an understanding of cross-border movements by people resident just north of the Angola-Namibia border between Ruacana and Katwitwi. The need for this work stems from the knowledge that Angolans from this area frequently cross into Namibia to obtain services (education, medical treatment, shopping, veterinary services etc) and to sell their agricultural produce. However, little is known about the details and importance of these crossings, regarding, for example: frequency, destination, dependency and economic value.

Gather views from Angolans on cross-border movements by Namibian livestock owners, with special attention paid to the frequency, spatial extent and size of cattle movements. These Angolan perspectives will provide context for the interpretation of data on livestock farming being collected independently just south of the border in Namibia. At least five farmers should be interviewed each day over a period of six days of field work. Interview administrative officers in the provincial capital of Ondjiva to obtain broader-scale information. Interviews will be open-ended but will also be guided by questions developed for the household survey being conducted in Namibia to the south of the border.