



Fences and grazing management in northern Namibia

Brice Prudat, Lena Bloemertz, and Nikolaus J. Kuhn

University of Basel, Physical Geography, Environmental Sciences, Basel, Switzerland (brice.prudat@unibas.ch)

Since Namibian independence, many fences have been erected in the communal land of the Ohangwena region in northern Namibia. Most fencing issues discussed so far in the region concern large-scale fencing of communal land by the new Namibian elite. Rarely discussed are the fences erected around small-scale farmers' parcels. This paper will discuss the impact of such increased small-scale fencing activities in northern Namibia.

Fencing of land has different functions, including protection of fields against livestock and securing property rights. However, not all community members can afford the monetary and labor costs involved. In the annual agricultural cycle of the study area, livestock is left un-herded after the harvest of most crops. They can then feed on available crop remains and grass on the fields. The livestock then freely utilizes unfenced and unprotected land. This system has the advantage to accelerate crop degradation and fertilize the soils. However, by erecting efficient fences, the new middle-class community members concentrate fertility in their own field, thereby degrading agricultural soils of poorer farmers. Potentially, such small-scale fencing of land has therefore an impact on soil quality and thus fosters degradation of unfenced cropland. By using fences as features to determine the limits of the new land rights, the ongoing Communal Land Reform may not only promote the erection of fences, but may also have a negative impact on soil quality and potentially food security of small-scale farmers without cattle.