

Tenure security and meaning of land: Youth participation and perceptions on customary land ownership and registration in the selected regions of Namibia

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**Customary land: Kambowo village in
Kavango East region
(Photo by K.M. Likuwa, 2014)**

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- Frans Dimbare youth.
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- Mwene womukunda of Okongo.
- Okongo village youth.
- Onakalunga village youth
- Rucara and Hoha village youth
- Rundu Youth Centre Youth.

BACKGROUND

- After Namibia's independence, the Government promoted the registration of customary land as a means to secure livelihood.
- Customary land registration had both successful stories (Olukonda in Otjikoto region) but a rejection in others (such as was the case in the Kavango regions).

- Rejection of customary land registration has brought to question the moral grounds and usefulness of applying for and registering customary land in a manner believed and feared by communities to be incompatible with local practices of land ownership, allocation and usage.
- The voices of youth who are the leaders of tomorrow and for whom the land is looked after by their elders, have been absent from the discourses on customary land ownership and registration.

OBJECTIVES

- The central objective of the study was to analyze youth perceptions on customary land registration and participation.
- The study asked questions such as; why have the youth have been silent on customary land ownership and registration; what is their perceptions on customary land registration and participation and; what should be the way forward to improve youth participation in customary land ownership and registration?

METHODOLOGY

- For a qualitative approach, oral interviews were carried out spending about one week in each region.
- Round table discussions were organized through the Village Development Committee members or the ministry of youth officials.
- A sample of 80 youth, i.e., 20 from each of the four selected regions of Ohangwena, Zambezi, Hardap and Kavango East, were identified for the study. The sample was selected purposefully to ensure gender representation.
- The recorded interviews were transcribed, translated and analyzed.

DISCUSSIONS

YOUTH PERCEPTIONS ON CUSTOMARY LAND REGISTRATION

- The government's mobilizing campaigns have not fully convinced people why they must register and how this will help them.
- Youth believe (wrongly so) that customary land is already traditionally owned by the Chiefs and they fear therefore that the registration of it would result in the loss and lack of control over it to the government.

- Some youth are not convinced of the Government's assertion about improved security of tenure over customary land through registration.
- Instead, some youth believe that registration would put them in an insecure position as they may eventually be compelled by the State to pay tax for the registered communal land and eventually lose it if they fail to pay.



Dr Kletus Likuwa and Mr Michael Shirungu from UNAM standing among the youth of Frans Dimbare Youth Centre after discussion, November 2014 (Courtesy of Dr. Ahmed Cheik Youssef).

- They believe that the reduction of the current large pieces of land to a mere 20 hectare plot, will result in no land available for their expanding families.
- Youth assert that they do not attend the community meetings on customary land rights registration since they are not invited and that others ignore the meetings as they do not own land and therefore sees no need to attend.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- Since the youth do not own land they are reluctant and ignorant to participate as they do not see what is in it for them.
- Generally, the youth have less access to and ownership of customary land, although males are better positioned than females due to patriarchal setups.
- Since customary land is traditionally acquired through one's family structure, many youth who, for example, find themselves in new villages for permanent work find it difficult to acquire land in those new villages, as it is not their family land.



Dr. Likuwa discusses with the youth in the Zambezi, 2014 (Photo by Erica Libuku)

- Some youth lack information on how to go about acquiring customary land as independent individuals through the Ministry of Land Reform
- Since, traditionally, customary land ownership comes with marriage, many youth are landless and do not have access to customary land because they are not yet married.
- In many cases, the youth who own customary land are absentee farmers who live in the urban areas and only send financial resources to their parents in the rural areas to plough the fields for them.

YOUTH'S SILENCE

- Some youth have been silent on discussing customary land issues because they believe that these are matters for the elders. Therefore, to some of them, maturity goes along with involvement in the land matters.
- The absence of youth programs to promote land reform issues among the youth contributes to their continued silence.
- The youth voices are silent in the rural areas as many have migrated to urban areas to attend schools or look for employment opportunities and only the older people are left behind to take care of customary land.

- While youth voices on land ownership are silent in rural areas they are vocal in the urban areas where lack of accommodation and high rentals has raised critical concerns.

CONCLUSION

- The youth in communal areas have been silent on issues related to customary land ownership rights and registration and lack knowledge about it because they believe that customary land issues are for the older people.
- The Government's slowness in land reform is used as a reason to refuse customary land registration by the youth.
- The youth believe that the rural areas fall short of their expectations in terms of development and therefore many leave the rural areas and settle in towns, with little intention to leave the urban areas unless their urban future plans fail.

- Migration by the youth to towns means that strong assertions about the need to own land and register it are made by the youth in the urban areas, as they are more desperate to find permanent settlement and carve out a future than the rural youth who see little future in the rural areas and therefore do not make strong assertions to owning land for settlement.
- Since the majority of the youth that were interviewed in this study were unemployed, their wishes to successfully implement their dreams, hopes and aspirations on customary land will depend on their ability to secure financial support, which remains a challenge to many young people.

WAY FORWARD

- Land campaigns should target the youth beyond radio, televisions and newspapers medium towards introducing a youth land program through the line ministries.
- Youth should be registered for customary land in their individual rights rather than through their parents and special preference should now be given to female youth.
- Elders should become part of the youth land discussions or dialogue so that they begin to understand the social and economic plights of the youth better.

- There is a need to encourage a nation-wide youth dialogue on the land issue by establishing new youth national land networks to ensure that when a youth has a land related problem they know where to find redress.
- Since the majority of the youth who were interviewed are unemployed but wishes to successfully implement their dreams, hopes and aspirations the government need to increase investments on youth land support programmes.

MPANDU/ OKUHEPA, THANK YOU.