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## Research Project

# Communal land reform in Namibia - Implications of Individualisation of land tenure

### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Communal land reform in Namibia - Implications of Individualisation of land tenure

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**Department**

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At its independence in 1990, Namibia inherited a twofold land rights system based in the colonial separation of ? and ? areas. In communal areas, where the major part of the population lives, there are no free-hold titles, but use rights are assigned to households by Traditional Authorities. In 2002, the Communal Land Reform Act laid the basis for formalization and state registration of communal land rights; a process that is on-going and far from complete. Its aim is to make land tenure more secure and thus to increase the likelihood of tenants investing in the land; some see it as a precursor of a fully-fledged privatisation of communal lands. The consequences of land registration are controversially discussed in Namibia and are likely to provide important lessons for land registration elsewhere. Until now, however, no research is done to understand the local preconditions and consequences of land registration and the social and ecological dynamics linked to it. In close cooperation with the donor agencies financing the process and the Namibian authorities charged with implementing land rights registration, the proposed research project will accompany the registration process and provide a holistic image of its social and ecological consequences. The project's main aim is to assess whether more secure land titles can indeed protect land rights of the rural poor and simultaneously further sustainable agricultural development, as claimed by Namibian political actors, and what main factors are determining the likelihood of such an outcome.

The interdisciplinary research project will combine methods from social anthropology, as well as social and physical geography. In a pre-defined transect combining town lands, peri-urban areas, fields and rangelands, it will analyse the history of different land rights prior and in the run-up to communal land registration, will accompany the registration process itself and assess post-registration land conflicts. The resulting in-depth image of land uses will be combined with an analysis of soil quality in selected plots to create a baseline and the conceptual and practical tools for an ecological impact analysis. In order to integrate results from different research methods, a landscape change perspective will be used and the consequences of the transition between land rights regimes for landscape change and for social equity will be assessed.

The project will be highly important for the on-going theoretical discussions about ownership and sustainable land use, which link up to larger questions about pro-poor policies. It is very relevant for land policies in Namibia and beyond, offering a model case for the complex issues surrounding formalisation and privatisation of land use. All over Africa, these issues have become even more important in recent years due to large-scale international investments into agricultural land, which crucially affect local land use systems and increase political and economic pressure towards privatisation.

The project will combine researchers from Fribourg, Basel (both Switzerland) and Freiburg (Germany). It was developed and will be carried out in close cooperation with local actors in Namibia: the Department of Land Management at the Polytechnic of Namibia, the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement and the GIZ charged with technical consultation on and implementation of the land registration process.

**Keywords** social and political ecology, political anthropology, land management, social geography, rural development

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