

Capacity of Local Actors to Participate in Decentralised Water Governance: Insights from North Central Namibia

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Introduction

Decentralized water governance in Semi-Arid Namibia

- ❖ For over two decades now, decentralization has been practiced in African governments and it has become increasingly popular in water reforms due to expectations that decentralized governance provides an opportunity for greater participation across scales.
- ❖ In the water sector decentralization shifts power and responsibilities from the national government to lower tiers of government and community organizations.
- ❖ Participation is an essential part of successful decentralization in that it aims to ensure the involvement of different actors in managing the use of water resources.
- ❖ Our research in North Central Namibia examines the extent to which decentralized water reforms creates an enabling (limiting) environment for increased participation across scales.

Decentralization and Vertical Integration

- ❖ There is increasing recognition to include both top-down as well as bottom-up initiatives in an effort to recognize cross-scalar dynamics and maximize its effectiveness – linked to vertical integration in NAP.
- ❖ This is critical given the highly fragmented climate regime, hence the need to forge the links between national and sub-national adaptation.
- ❖ As decentralization has been practiced over the last two decades, it is worth examining whether decentralization increases participation across scales.
- ❖ Using our case study on decentralized water reform in Semi-Arid Namibia - what can we learn from decentralization for vertical integration in NAP process? Does decentralization creates an enabling (limiting) environment for vertical integration?

Framing our research

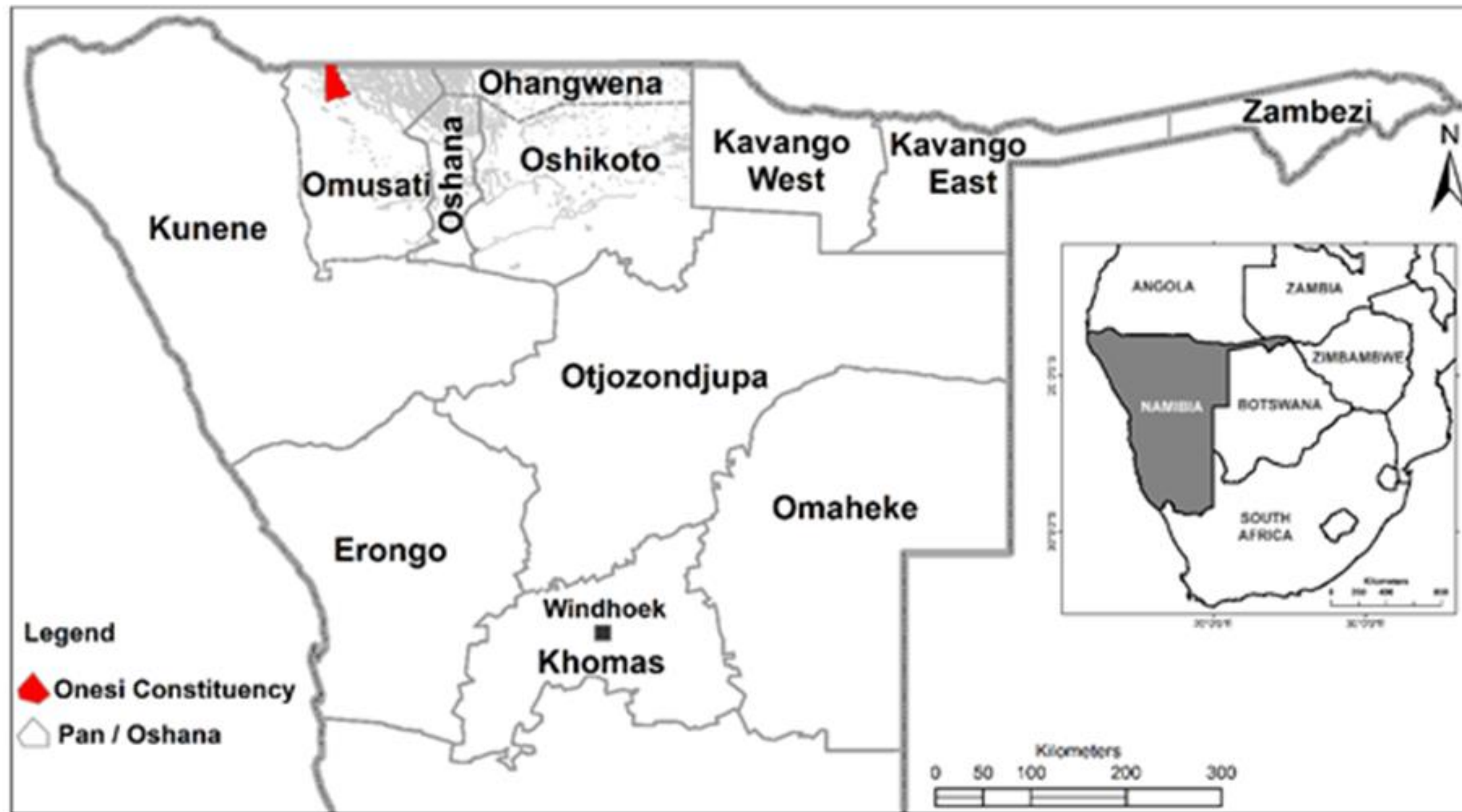
Water scarcity and decentralized water management in Namibia

- ❖ As increasing pressure to access water under uncertain climate grows across semi-arid Africa, water users and management agencies seek better institutional arrangements for effective management of water.
- ❖ Community based management has become increasingly popular in water sector reforms due to expectations that decentralized water governance provides an opportunity for greater participation across scales.
- ❖ However, the move has limited impact on participation because the efforts did not pay attention to strengthening the voices of the local people and their ability to participate in decision making across scales.

Case study

- ❖ Using a qualitative case study of reforms in the water sector in the semi-arid region of North Central Namibia, we examine the extent to which decentralised water reforms offer an opportunity for increased local participation across scales.
- ❖ Since 1997 Namibia has followed a community based water management strategy to provide the basis for national government to devolve some of the functions, responsibilities and resources to the lowest levels of government.
- ❖ Following this shift rural communities are required to manage and pay for water services.

Omusati Region, North Central Namibia



Case study...

- ❖ Governance structures at the national, sub-national and local levels were established as part of devolution of roles and responsibilities to increase participation of actors across scales.
- ❖ At the local level, government put in Water Point Associations and Water Point Committees as an attempt to actively support local people participation.
- ❖ However, the majority of these members live under poverty with high levels of illiteracy and limited resources which can be a challenge in terms of managing water points.



Methods and data

- ❖ Qualitative data collected between 2015 and 2017 in the Omusati Region of Namibia.
- ❖ A multi-scalar governance lens guided our research, which involved working at village, constituency and regional scale, paying attention to actors, resources and institutional arrangements.
- ❖ 24 key informants interviews to understand forms of participation and capacity of actors to participate in water resources management.
- ❖ A series of participatory research activities in three farming communities of Enongo, Eenkalashe and Olwaadhiya, all located in Onesí Constituency in the Omusati Region, Namibia

Does decentralization create an enabling environment for increased participation across scales?

- ❖ There is concentration of power and resources at the higher levels of government - can also lead to limited understanding of community needs.
- ❖ Limited flexibility of the regional (sub-national) government to act at the local level – decisions have to wait for funding sign off due to limited financial resources and institutional arrangements to make decisions.

"Funding is one of the problems. If, you [want] to work with the communities, you don't need to allow them to stay for too long without visiting them. If you make follow-up- meetings, the flow of information will continue" Basin Management Officer

- ❖ Overlapping functions – although its good for participation across scales i.e. Vertical Integration overlapping functions creates competition/confusion among actors making it difficult to coordinate actions across scales and hold actors responsible e.g. delays in repairing water points.

Does decentralization create an enabling environment for increased participation across scales? ...

- ❖ Capacity related issues – despite increased participation management of water points remains a challenge due to limited managerial, technical and financial capacities at the local level
- ❖ Tokenistic nature of participation – limited platforms for local people to air their views e.g. WPAs are independent body or structures that can't facilitate cross-scalar interaction.

“even if I had an opportunity there's no one I can go to suggest even if I had a suggestion.”





Conclusions

- ❖ For actors to effectively participate in water governance, they need to acquire capacities that support the implementation of their responsibilities. If the capacity of actors is not carefully assessed and built, the proposed reform will have a high chance of producing unexpected outcomes.
- ❖ Despite the progress made to establish institutional structures from national to local levels, mechanisms to facilitate cross-scalar interaction remains a big challenge.
- ❖ There needs to be a clear understanding of all actors who have a stake in water governance, to ensure that there is a balance between supporting engagement and empowerment.

Conclusions...

- ❖ The overlapping functions across governance scales affect action at the local level.
- ❖ One of the key objectives of increased participation is to incorporate local knowledge and experiences into decision making process. Increasingly adaptation to climate change is also prioritizing local level participation and decisions – vertical integration (see Argawal and Lemos 2006).

Wider implications

- ❖ Attention needs to be paid as to who is able to participate
 - ❖ although participatory processes aim for inclusion, in reality they often exclude significant group of people.
- ❖ Without support to enhance local participation, the benefits of decentralization remain limited.
 - ❖ In the case of Namibia, decentralized water governance has enabled central government to delegate its responsibilities to local authorities and people. However, this has not in reality been matched with the resources and capacity building needed available at the local level to take action.
- ❖ The type of participation impacts the quality of outcomes
 - ❖ By bringing the government closer to people, participation may lead to deeper understanding of the issues and better informed decisions. In Namibia decentralization has increased participation of local actors in water governance through Water Point Associations and associated 'Water Point Committees'

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