

A Summary Report of the Training Event at Otjerunda

9 May 2023

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Background

On 9th May 2023 we held the Otjerunda Event and it was BIG!!! It was full of enthusiasm for our Zakumuka Rangeland Rehydration project. We had numerous Chiefs etc, nearly 10 GA/villages represented and over 120 adult participants signed the attendance register. The event was originally planned to occur at Erora but their Chief at Otjerunda said he would host the meeting and ensure a good attendance. The objective of this event was to explain how the relatively recent degradation over between twenty and fifty years occurred through the dismantling of traditional grazing practices and a shift to unplanned continuous “laissez-faire” grazing. That resulted in livestock paths and was coupled with development of roads, both of which developed into aggressive, expanding gully systems. We also wanted to explain that this situation is recoverable with a holistic approach that addresses the legacy of dongas, prevents new ones and turns livestock into part of the solution. The ultimate objective was to allow participants to assess whether they need to make major changes or not.

Amon Kapi (Acting President of NNFU and Chairman of Zakumuka PC), Bertus Kruger (consultant to EDF11 on grazing etc) and Uhangatenua Kapi (IRDNC) all pulled out of the day close to it due to unforeseen circumstances, one the night before. That left me to carry the load but paraecologist Alex Hartley helped ease the pressure and our NUST intern Juliet Muhewa spent more time transporting attendants and doing extra shopping than attending the event. They were excellent support of the event.

The day

Formalities and prayer were followed by introductions from key community leaders and as some came later, they were allowed to introduce themselves. I then described the programme for the day and encouraged interruptions to seek clarification or relay an experience.

I commenced my presentation talking about the value chain using Colin Nott’s diagram of marginal reaction and then enhancing it with raindrop and soil moisture management. I talked briefly about each link but spent more time showing that without all links being functional, the system collapses. Key point being that it is one project or story, not a collation that you can pick and choose from in managing drainage ecosystems.

The focus of my presentation over 2 hours was about grazing management and how recently the degradation occurred. How the old system worked and then what the degradation process looked like as it progressed. Then why it happened according to many elders. Then the nitty gritty of how to treat a grass plant well - or badly. When the leaves ask for resources from the roots after a rain event, the root bank/ATM says; "You have insufficient funds for this request". That got a laugh. I then showed how the roots and leaves take it in turns to help each other to some extent and hence the need for recovery periods.

There was a chorus of questions about how can we reverse this? I went back to why the traditional system worked and its core principles. That there are different options but you need to look at what your plants need and how to make that work with smaller areas available within the modern GA context. “But how does that work?”

I then told the story of Erora (as Headman Matundu had asked me to do) including Colin Nott's fundamental breakthrough with combined group herding and then his shock at the extent of active gullying I showed him. The marriage of sound grazing management and Rangeland Rehydration developed from there. I also mentioned that when an area is to be rested for recovery it must be really rested and not just from cattle.

I then warned about jumping into combined group herding (CGH) when the drought hasn't broken and that the timing of this meeting gives them time to plan and that seemed a "no-brainer" to the participants.

There were some very innovative comments put forward and one that really resonated was that neighbouring GAs should take all livestock to the hills together so that everybody's plains get recovered. The subliminal message being that we stop stealing each other's grass even if we don't get into planned grazing. This would have been a big outcome for Erora and Headman Matundu and what he hoped would come from the meeting.

That said, somebody suggested that they were tired of giving Erora all the presents, that they were a bit envious now. This elicited both applause and laughter. What matters though is how many of them referred to Erora in terms of how they see the future of their GA. I had already mentioned that Erora and Outokotorua had made some mistakes going into the drought that they acknowledged and that in a really intense and prolonged drought, no grazing strategy works within the confines of a GA. However with planned grazing and no straying livestock, crisis points are much less likely once perennial pastures are established as they will grow feed even in a miserable season.

I then returned to the holistic approach, reminding the participants that good grazing management will stop creating new gullies from livestock paths and allow any small issues to heal during recovery periods. In response to a question about repairing gullies I stressed the number of different effective approaches and that what really matters is understanding the causes and dealing with them and then being clear about what the objective is before opening the toolbox.

Finally I referred to a Ken Tinley (DSc.) diagram in the meeting handout (attached) showing browse and understorey plants and topsoil in a gradient from excellent to destroyed and discussed the need for attention to browse as that is what livestock survive on (including cattle) when the pressure is on. I append some diagrams I talked to.

Then the broader issues were brought up and Alex and I focused on recording them and answering where appropriate. The key issues raised were:

1. Local conflicts between different land users within a GA are not treated fairly such as by some gazetted Chiefs when they take sides between livestock owners and others such as gardeners or miners. Later this was followed up by a follow up question:
2. Can ZAPCO help prepare constitutions for Traditional Authorities?
3. When will the promised livestock marketing start?
4. Zakumuka must be restarted now!

This caused much discussion, mostly people venting frustrations. I assured them that Amon was acutely aware of this and was in Opuwo to see how that could be resolved and had planned to be at this meeting to answer questions until he was called to Windhoek for a key meeting with GRN.

5. MeatCo promised a mobile slaughter truck now in Kavango at their Opuwo meeting. Where is it?

I explained that this was very much in Amon's mind and he was actively trying to get it moved from Kavango.

6. EDF11 and NILALEG are not communicating and this will divide communities.
I explained my relationship with Kambuake (Uhangatenua Kapi) and assured the meeting that we were already helping each other such as at the Erora training where Kambuake spoke on grazing management and we visited the Otjerunda NILALEG forage exclosure and then provided agronomic advice. We are working together maximising our respective strengths (synergy) and budgets. That was well received by the anxious questioner.
7. It is vitally important to have a really strong project manager who can ensure that the aspirations of the community and the objectives of funders etc are both met and that there is feedback between them.
Those aren't my words, the guy is doing a Masters on the subject but is a local.
8. How do you deal with increased population pressure? (From the same person)
I answered by firstly saying it is unlikely accepted settlers can be asked to now leave within culture. I then referred to Omunuandjai where people can bring their livestock for a specified time but they are definitely not now settled there. I also suggested that community culture will benefit by becoming more innovative to grow food to feed humans and livestock and maybe sell food and definitely prime livestock when all the rest in the market have already lost condition.
9. The reactivation of the Opuwo Abattoir has been promised for decades and once again we see nothing.
I mentioned that Amon is applying pressure through NNFU because there is a budget to do the works. It is an example of how he can be away from Kunene but push for important initiatives that have been promised.
10. We are tired of words now; we just want action.
This gentleman from Otuzemba then recalled decades of broken promises regarding the abattoir and asked if this is what these projects (EDF11 and NILALEG) will continue.

We then broke for lunch and folks seemed to be losing energy and I thought we would just wrap up and say "thank you" after lunch. However when we reassembled, I asked the Chairman to ask the meeting what they thought of the presentation and any comments about the relevance to their GA. This led immediately to a resurgence of energy and we closed over an hour and a half later after 4pm. I was very happy to see how much enthusiasm was expressed for participating in EDF11/ZAPCO after the previous proposed question and answer session turned into a discussion of higher-level issues.

The formal requests to be participants in EDF11 include:

1. Otjerunda (Chief Tjijeura) would like full involvement.
2. Otuzemba (Mr Mbingue) especially herding, hopefully also Otjitoko
3. Otuvero (Mr Jakuva) would like a training event.
4. Okamborato (Mr Tjundukamha) wants help to stop small gullies getting bigger.
5. Otjitumba (Mr Muundjua) would like training.
6. Omanduu, Otjouye, Otjituova (Mr Muhukua) would like training.

There were some motivational speeches by hosting Chiefs as we closed and one comment struck me as very important: "You must go back to your areas and plan a better way of managing and you must not rely on other people to pay for everything. You must look to funding your own projects".

Summary reflections

1. There is overwhelming acceptance that the land is sick and changes are needed.

2. There is incredibly strong enthusiasm for repairing the damage as they saw at Erora.
3. There is real anxiety about lack of knowledge about both intertwined aspects of Rangeland Rehydration and planned grazing.
4. All the communities want support
We can do this with Bertus and ZCRR integration but we need to plan it.
5. Some communities are principally interested in gully/sheeting or grazing management but not both, but I sense that this could change when we work with them if they have erosion or grazing issues.
6. Some communities agree that they have impacted on Erora because they repaired grasslands in their landscapes and it was there at the beginning of the drought. `
7. One Chief suggests group GA collaboration to limit damage to the recovery of plains should happen and all GAs will benefit.
8. Clearly there was comment about lack of delivery “action” regarding partners in EDF11.

Value chain management

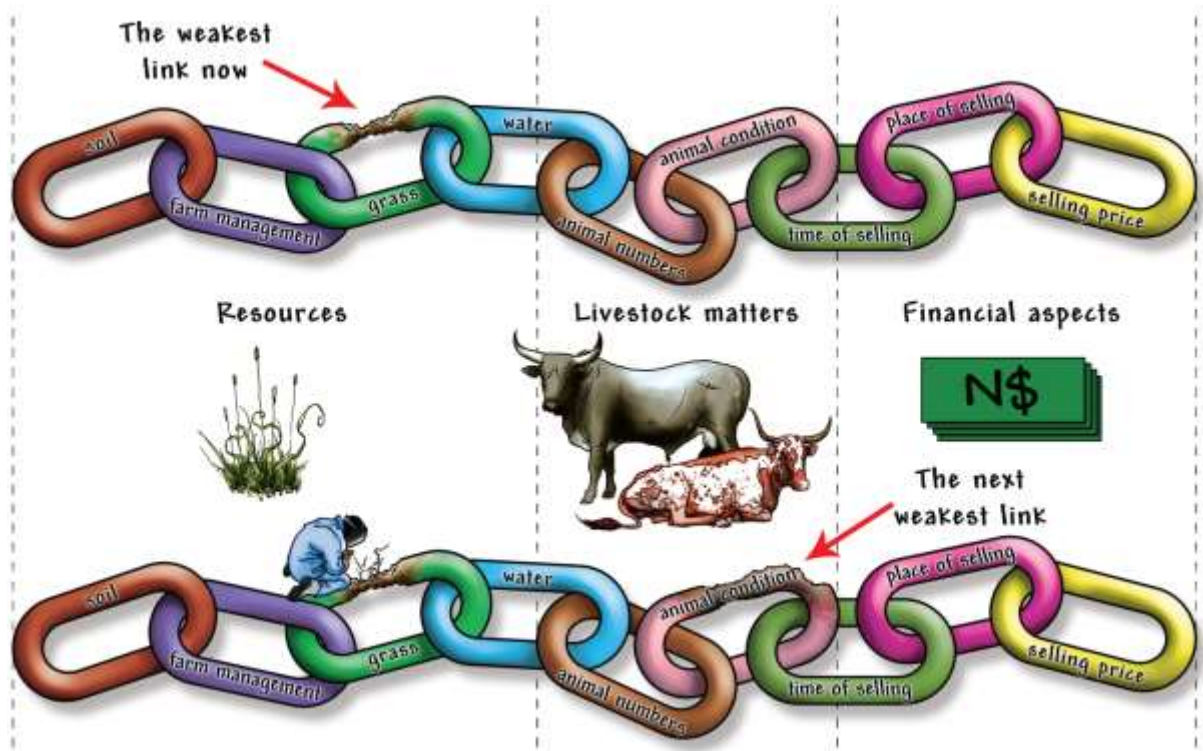
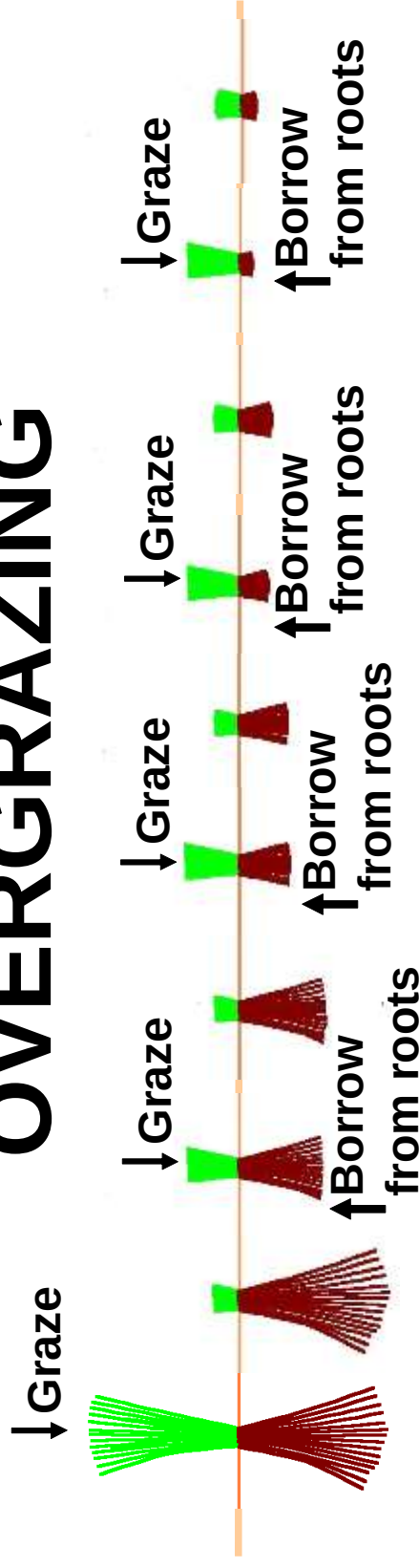


Diagram above courtesy Colin Nott



GRASS NEEDS REST

OVERGRAZING



GRAZING & REST

