

RECLAMATION APPROACH TO ADDRESS BUSH ENCROUCHED ON LAND REFORM FARMS IN NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the extent to which land degradation (bush encroachment) affects the productivity of Namibian commercial farms is reviewed. Reclamation techniques and approaches were explored and are discussed in the context of Namibia's land reform programme.

Land reform is perceived to create opportunities for livelihood advancement or poverty alleviation in developing countries through the provision of land which the beneficiaries can farm and thus sustain their livelihoods. Namibia, alongside South Africa, therefore embarked on a land reform programme hoping to alleviate poverty by providing land to both urban and rural poor and landless people.

However, the beneficiaries face various economic and environmental factors that limit agricultural potential such as a lack of agricultural subsidies and land degradation. Among the known land degradation problems, bush encroachment (invading vegetation) is considered an issue of great concern claiming about 26 million hectares of the country's agricultural land. The invasion of non-palatable woody species suppresses the growth of palatable grass species and thus reduces the carrying capacity of rangelands.

With reduced carrying capacities, farmers are unable to farm at economically viable stocking rates, especially considering that with the Farm Unit Resettlement Scheme (a land reform scheme) for instance, the farms are sub-divided into smaller and less economical units. This has led to a reduction in livestock population from 2.5 million to 800 000 and therefore an economic loss of N\$ 700 million to the commercial agricultural industry in Namibia.

This study found that good scientific recommendations are not lacking and neither is the policy framework on how to deal with the invading bush problem. It is implementation that is severely lacking. Hence, the conclusion from this study is that the lack of implementation of scientific recommendations is due to a lack of awareness on the part of the farmers. Building on the Landcare experience from other nations, it is proposed that a Landcare Secretariat should be established in Namibia as a platform through which the institutional arrangement could be improved, hence drawing farmer's attention to these recommendations.