Sustainable use of wetlands in Namibia - a new review

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Namibia

Review of Policy and Legislative Support to the Sustainable use of Wetlands in Namibia with specific Reference to the Zambezi River Basin

by Shirley Bethune and Oliver C Ruppel

Wetlands in Southern Africa are an important source of water and nutrients necessary for biological productivity and often sheer survival of people. Wetlands provide for natural resources as well as for ecological services and they have an economic value. Sustainable management of wetlands is crucial to the protection of ecosystems.

The low rainfall and high evaporation typical for most of Namibia means that surface water supplies are irregular and unreliable, as is groundwater recharge. As a result, water is often inadequately distributed. Historically, water supply priority was given to the water needs of people, livestock, industry and agriculture. Wetlands, their natural resources and their environmental water requirements were not specifically acknowledged. Legislation at the time of Namibia's Independence did not recognise the natural environment as a user of water, a habitat for aquatic plants and animals nor as a provider of essential processes and services. Nor did it stipulate the sustainable use of water resources in socio-economic and environmental terms.

Today, Namibia has a broad range of sectoral policies, plans and laws, particularly those applicable to natural resource conservation, management and utilisation that are pertinent to the conservation and management of Wetlands in Namibia. The paper traces the status of policy and legislative support to the sustainable use of wetlands with specific reference to the Zambezi River Basin from a Namibian as well as from an international perspective in order to highlight the importance of wetlands. The review also identifies gaps within policies or legislation and gives recommendations in order to allow more sustainable management of wetlands in Namibia.

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The study - a country report for Namibia - is part of the Zambezi Basin Wetlands Project, facilitated by the World Conservation Union (IUCN ROSA). The report was prepared by:

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