

Chapter 7. People in the Cuvelai-Etосha Basin.

In 2010, the population of the Basin was estimated to be about 900,000 people, of whom about 140,000 were living in towns and the remaining 760,000 were in rural areas.¹ These figures are notable for several reasons. Firstly, the density of people in rural areas is considerably greater than in any other rural areas in south-western Africa (see Figure 1.xx). This is largely a consequence of the fertility of the soils and the availability of fresh water in shallow hand-dug wells.

Secondly, the Basin's population is rapidly becoming urbanised as more and more people make their homes and livelihoods in towns. In addition, most rural homes obtain most of their food and other basic needs from income derived outside their farmsteads, for example from wages, business earnings, pensions and remittances.² As curious as it might seem, the majority of people who grow crops and have livestock actually obtain most of their income from sources unrelated to farming.

A third noteworthy feature of the Basin's population is the very close relationship between the Cuvelai wetlands and the Owambo people, a relationship that was established when Owambo people settled here some 500 to 600 years ago.³ This is also true in the Angolan half of the Cuvelai where the people are known as Ambo. Historically, all Ambo/Owambo people lived in this wetland area. In a sense, the Cuvelai and Owambo tribe are synonymous; the mention of one invokes the other. There can be few other wetlands and tribes anywhere in the world where the association is as intimate.

The return of earnings through remittances and salaries has been a major contributor to the economy of the Basin over the past century. This began through people working as temporary migrant labourers on farms and mines and in towns elsewhere in Namibia, but over the years more and more people moved south permanently. Of all households in Namibia that reported Oshiwambo as their home language during the 2001 population census, 74% were in the Cuvelai and 26% were elsewhere in Namibia. Most Oshiwambo-speakers living elsewhere are of working ages, and most are men.

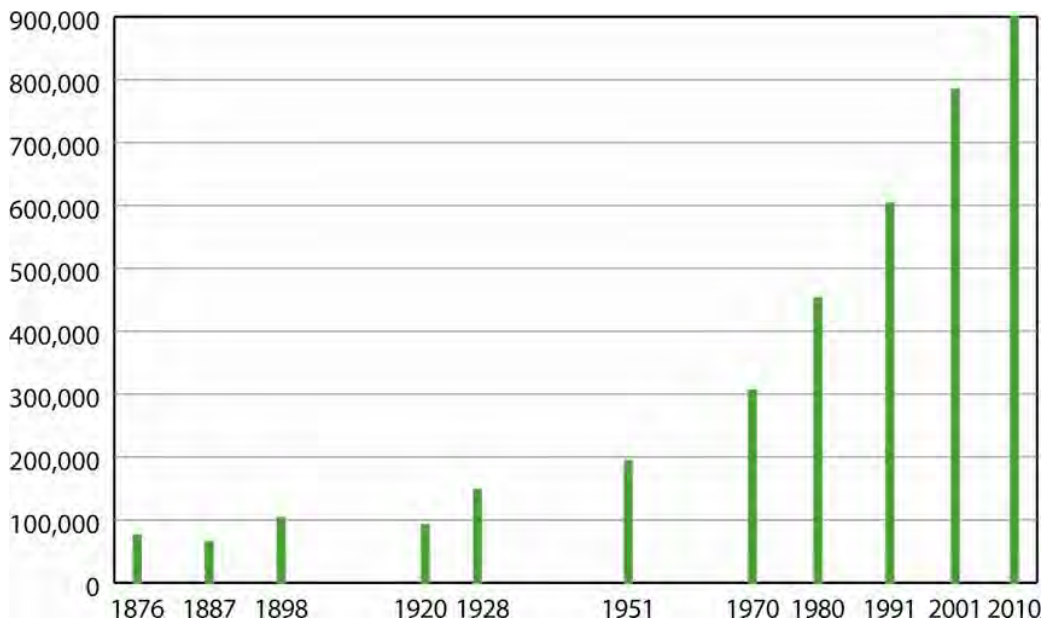
Figure 7.1. The density of people in 2010.⁴ The great majority of people in the Cuvelai-Etосha Basin live in a broad zone between Omuthiya, Okahao, Ruacana and Eenhana. The highest rural population densities in this zone exceed 100 people/square kilometre. Outside this zone, densities are lower and the population is more scattered.

The density of rural populations is largely a consequence of several factors, the most important of which are the fertility of soils for crop farming, availability of higher ground which will not be flooded, access to fresh drinking water, and proximity to services and towns. The absence of water and productive soils are the main limiting factors in the large very sparsely populated areas in eastern Oshikoto and western Omusati.

opportunities. Improved survival in Namibia due to medical services at clinics and hospitals also led the population to grow rapidly.

Over the past 30 years, the population has grown by approximately 2.2% each year. If that rate of growth continues, the Basin can expect to have a population of about 1.1 million in 2020 and 1.4 million in 2030.

Although about 84% of people live in rural areas of the Cuvelai, urban populations are growing very rapidly. The four big urban areas are Tsumeb, Oshakati, Ondangwa and Oshikango which is a large cross-border metropolitan hub. As an indication of how these towns have grown, Oshakati's population grew from about 3,700 people in 1981 to 27,800 in 1991 and now probably stands at about 59,000 people. Ondangwa increased from 1,000 people in 1981 to 9,000 in 1991 and probably about 23,000 in 2010.



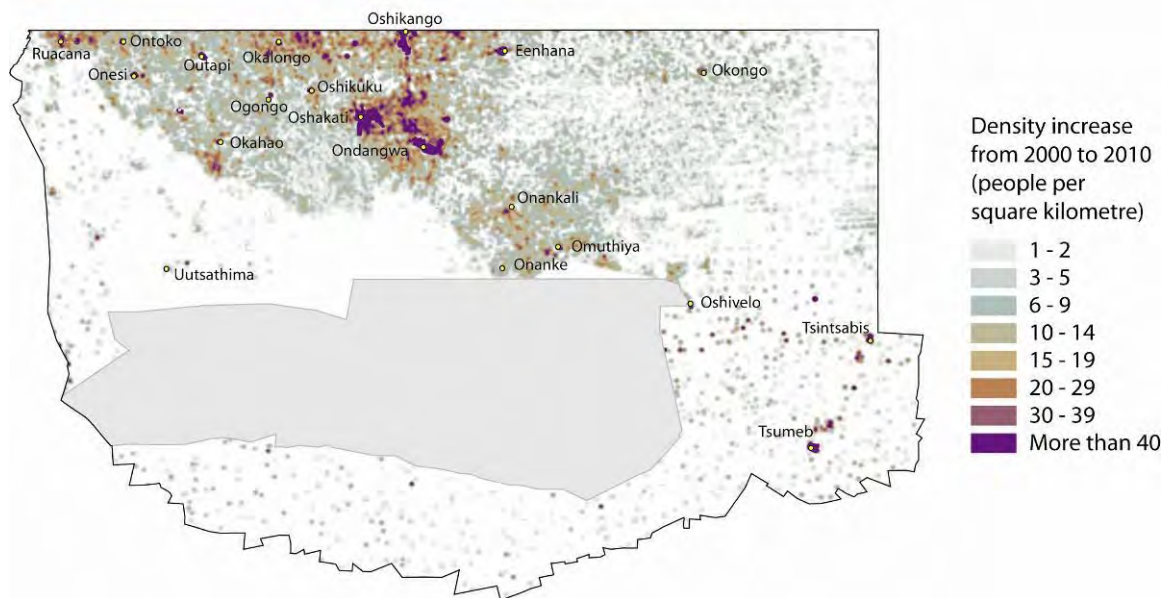
The economies of Oshakati (shown here) and other emerging cities are dominated by trade, much of which is directly or indirectly associated with cross-border imports and exports

between Namibia and Angola. However, there is also a sizeable trading sector that sells goods to residents in these and other towns, as well as to rural homes.

Public services also contribute significantly to the economies of the large towns, especially Ondangwa and Oshakati which house the administrative offices and staff for most government departments which are represented in the Namibian Cuvelai.

Figure 7.4. Growth in the population from 2000 to 2010.⁷ Over the past 10 years most population growth has been around the urban areas of Oshakati, Ondangwa and Oshikango. Commercial and economic growth in these areas has been so substantial that semi-metropolitan complexes have developed at Onethindi - Ondangwa, Ongwediva - Oshakati, and Oshikango - Omafo - Engela - Ohangwena.

There has also been rapid population growth in the emerging towns of Okongo, Eenhana, Okalongo, Oshikuku, Outapi, Okahao, Tsandi and Onesi. Further from towns, significant numbers of rural homesteads have been recently established south of Okahao, near Ruacana and in areas surrounding Onankali and Omuthiya.





In addition to Tsumeb and the emerging cities of Oshakati, Ondangwa and Oshikango, several other towns are growing rapidly as administrative centres and commercial centres. The biggest are Outapi, Eenhana Omuthiya and Okahao (left). Other significant and growing towns are Oshivelo, Tsandi, Oshikuku (right), Okalango, Onesi, Okongo, Onuno, Engela and Ohangwena.

The economies of all these places are dominated by local commerce, and many young people are attracted to the towns by the potential of finding jobs and other sources of cash which are generally absent in rural areas. While some of the towns first developed around missions and their schools and hospitals – such as Engela and Oshikuku – most have grown from small groups of informal shops, bars or shebeens, popularly and locally known as *cuca* shops. There are hundreds of clusters (called *uundingosho*) of these shops across the Cuvelai.

Figure 7.5. Tribal areas.⁸ The great majority of people in the Basin are Oshiwambo speakers, usually called Owambo in Namibia and Ambó in Angola. There are eight major Owambo traditional authority areas, some with their own distinct dialects: Kwanyama, Ndonga, Ombalantu, Ombandja, Ongandjera, Uukolonkadhi, Uukwaluudhi and Uukwambi. Each of these is headed by a chief, who is supported by senior councillors. The councillors represent different wards or districts, within which there are local headmen who authorise land allocations and solve local issues using customary law. Significant numbers of Zemba people live close to the Kunene River within the Uukolonkadhi area, while a mix of people live south of Etosha and in southern Oshikoto which is traditionally a Hei//om area. Only two of the Oshiwambo dialects are widely used in the written form, and their speakers form the largest groups: Kwanyama and Ndonga.

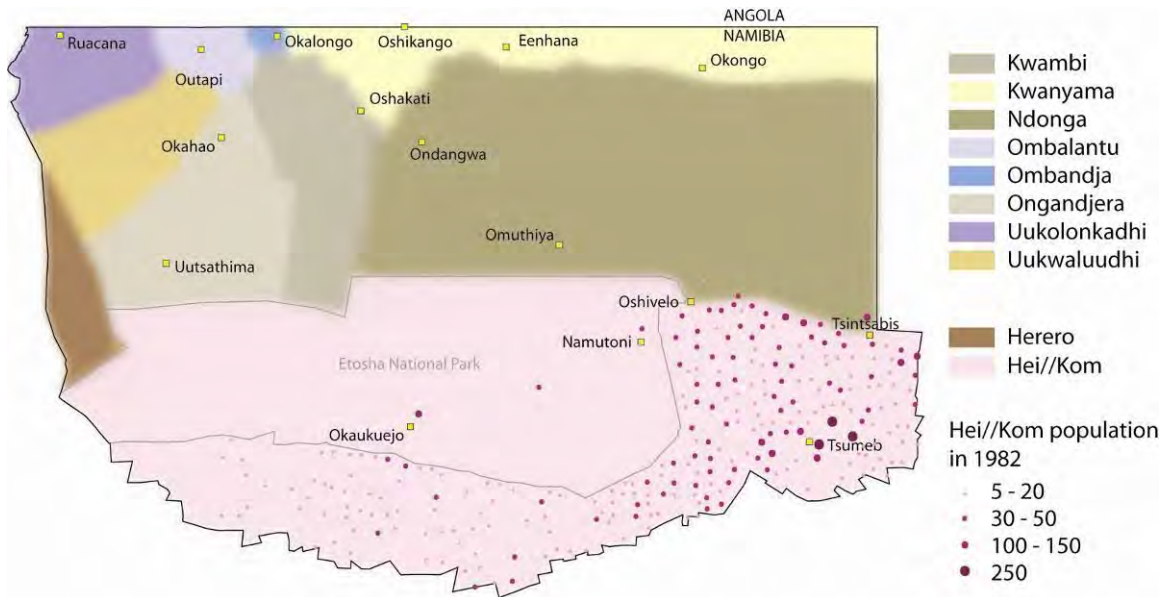
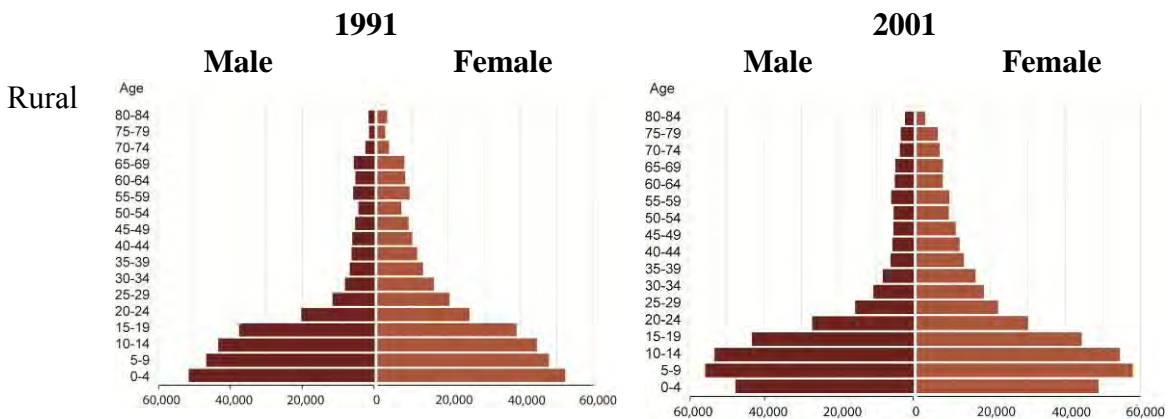


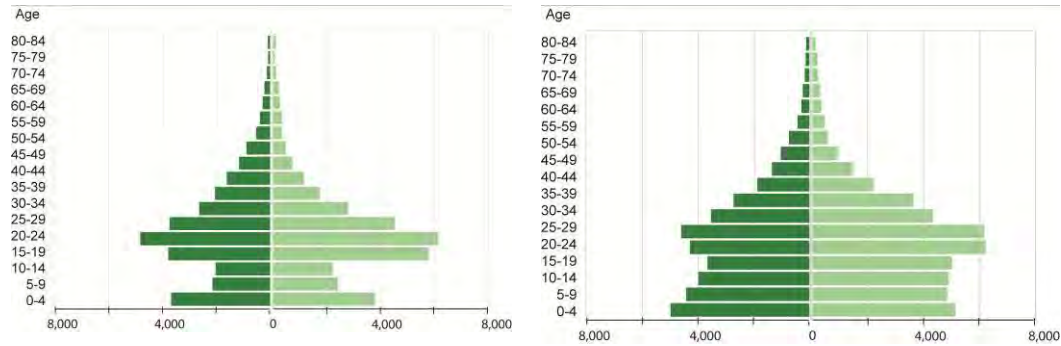
Figure 7.6. The structure of the population.⁹ The structure of rural and urban populations is quite different. Rural residents consist of large numbers of people younger than 20 years, and rather few people of working ages in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. Above the age of 25, there are also many more women than men in rural areas.

By contrast, urban areas have great numbers of working-aged people in their 20s, 30s and 40s, but rather few children and people aged over 60 years. Urban populations in 1991 consisted of few teenagers and younger children, but this had changed by 2001 when youth made up a high proportion of urban dwellers.

These patterns are the consequence of the migration of working age people in search of work (especially men) to urban areas both within the Basin and to other areas of Namibia.



Urban



The average number of children born to each woman as measured in 1991, 2001 and 2006.¹⁰ Even though the number of people in rural areas grew between 1991 and 2001, there were considerably fewer children in the population in 2001 than in 1991. This was due to a significant decline in fertility, as shown by the table below. Declining fertility is correlated with the increasing levels of female education and employment which means that women spend more time as wage earners rather than being full-time mothers. The greater use of condoms to reduce the risk of catching HIV probably also led to fewer pregnancies.

Region	1991	2001	2006
<i>Namibia</i>	6.1	4.1	4.5
Ohangwena	7.7	5.3	5.3
Omusati	5.7	4.0	4.0
Oshana	5.6	3.7	3.7
Oshikoto	6.7	4.6	4.6

Infant and child mortality rates in 1991, 2001 and 2006.¹¹ Infant mortality is the number of babies out of 1,000 live births that die in their first year of life, while child mortality is the number of children that die between their 1st and 5th birthdays out of 1,000 infants that have reached 1 year of age. Both infant and child mortality dropped in all regions between 1991 and 2001, but then increased in some regions between 2001 and 2006.

	Infant Mortality			Under-5 Mortality		
	1991	2001	2006	1991	2001	2006
<i>Namibia</i>	67	52	50	87	71	63
Ohangwena	59	56	63	109	78	94
Omusati	49	39	38	64	61	30
Oshana	62	44	51	80	64	78
Oshikoto	66	60	68	86	74	51

The proportion of households headed by women.¹² A much higher percentage of homes are headed by females than elsewhere in the country, largely as a result of the high rates of emigration by men to work elsewhere in Namibia. On average, three out of five homes in the Basin are headed by women. The figures in the table are percentages of homes with female heads. A high proportion of female-headed families support orphans and/or the children of parents who are working elsewhere.

	2001	2006
<i>Namibia</i>	44.7	43.0
Ohangwena	59.7	60.7
Omusati	62.0	58.6
Oshana	54.0	54.7
Oshikoto	50.0	50.9

Figure 7.7. Household sizes. Rural households are generally much bigger than those in urban areas. Families in towns tend to be more nuclear, frequently consisting only of adults or of parents with one or two children. Rural homes often consist of more extended families of grandparents, parents and children.

Among rural homes, those with the largest number of household members are generally wealthier and more resilient to misfortune than those with fewer members. This is because large households have a greater number and variety of incomes, and more labour available for farming and domestic work.

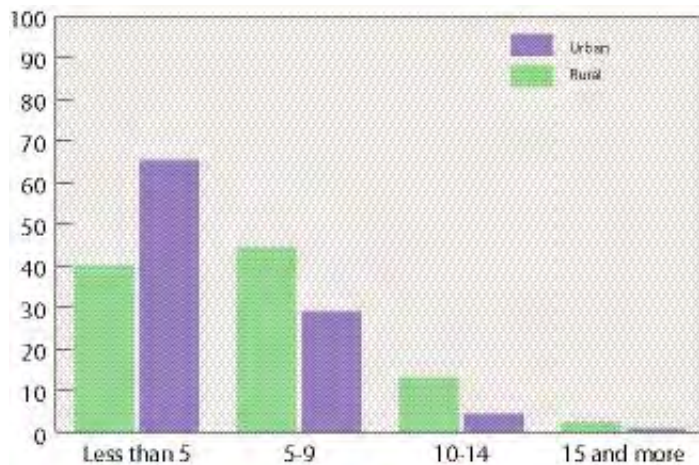


Figure 7.8. Expenditure per person in 2010.¹³ This map of the median annual expenditure per person as estimated for 2010 shows that levels of wealth and poverty vary widely. The richest people are in the freehold farms and in towns throughout the Basin. People living within the densely populated zone between Omuthiya, Okahao, Outapi and Oshikango are, on average, significantly richer than those in more remote and rural areas to the east, west and south.

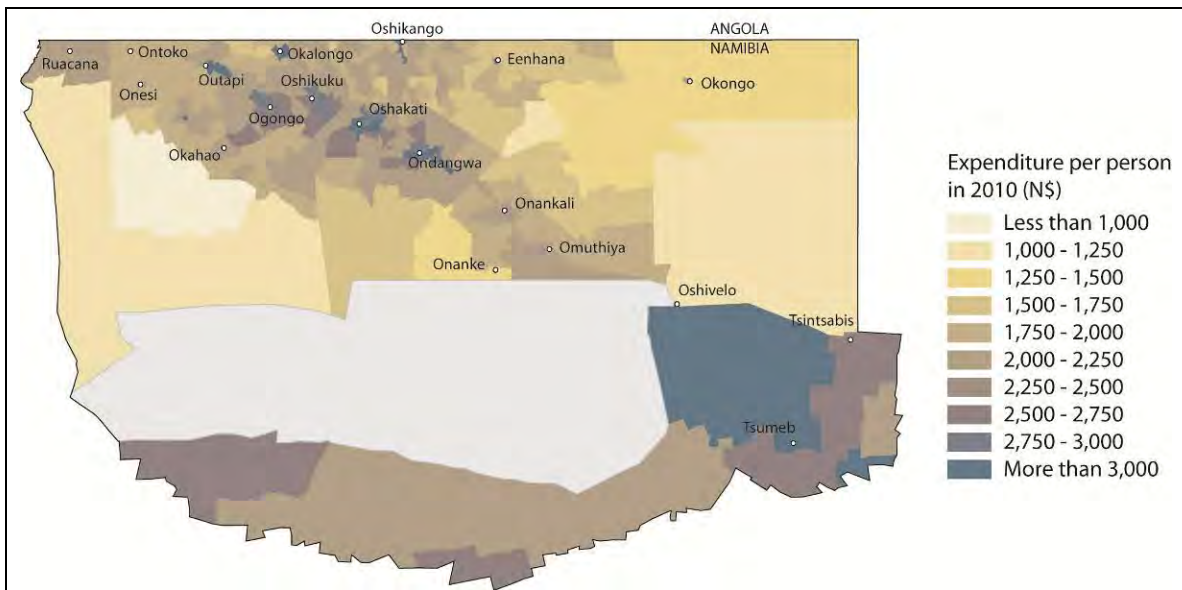
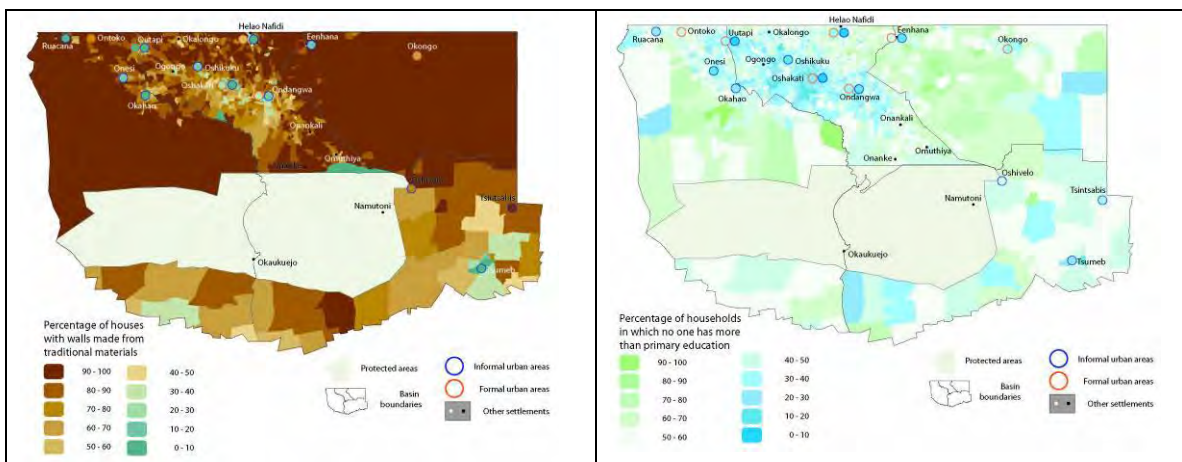
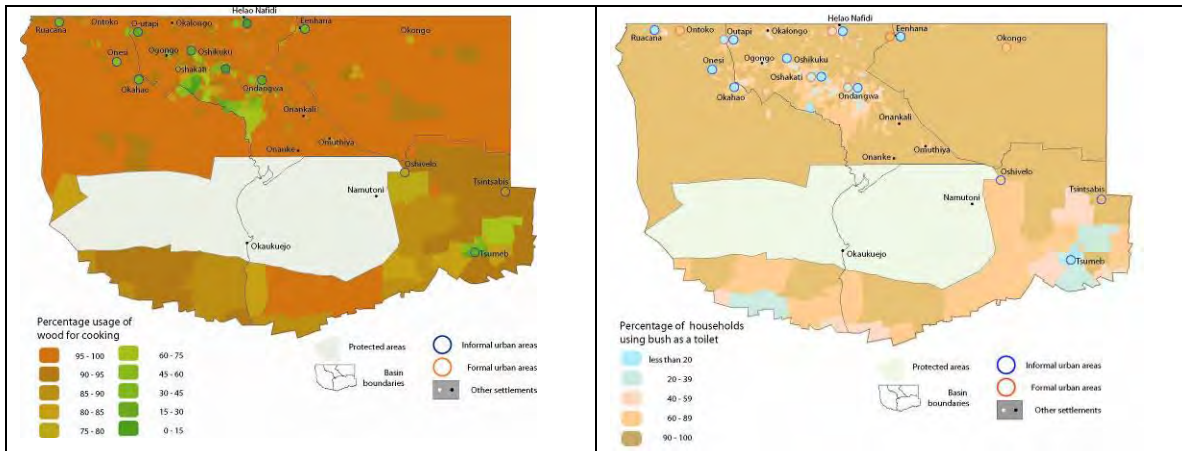


Figure 7.9. Measures of wealth and poverty.¹⁴ These four maps provide other indices of welfare by showing proportions of homes in different areas that are built largely of local materials as opposed to bricks and other purchased construction materials (top left), in which no one has more than a primary school education (top right), that use wood for cooking as opposed to purchased fuels (bottom left) and that use the bush as a toilet. All four indices confirm the patterns of wealth shown in Figure 7.8 that the poorest households are in the most remote areas, and that higher proportions of wealthier homes are found in the densely populated swathe between Omuthiya and Outapi and Oshikango, in towns and in the freehold farms in the south of the Basin. Of course, very significant numbers of extremely poor people also live within these zones that are generally relatively better-off.





Even though the more remote rural parts of the Basin are characterised by greater levels of poverty than areas close to the main roads and towns, there are many very poor people in that relatively wealthier zone. Those poorer homes are typically small and headed by

elderly women with perhaps just two or three other family members, normally children or other elderly people. Their farms usually consist of just one or two hectares of fields which are often on less fertile soils than those of their neighbours. In addition to having fewer household members of working age, the poorer homes generally have no goats, donkeys or cattle, and are often on lower ground which is more prone to flooding. Few of the buildings in poor homes (such as the small homestead on the left) are built with materials bought with cash, whereas those of richer households are often at least partially built of bricks, corrugated iron and other bought materials (as the large homestead on the right). In short, poor homes live largely off labour supplied by their few family members while wealthier households live off cash incomes from larger families.



Although the trend in the Basin is towards increasing urbanisation and cash incomes, there are still many poor homes and households that depend on local resources in the Basin. However, the benefit of incomes from diverse sources that are largely independent of agriculture means that most families are now reasonably resilient to the effects of drought or other calamities. This is a huge improvement on conditions when drought and infestations of locusts and worms caused severe famine. The worst recorded famines occurred in 1877/79, 1907/08, 1915, 1920 and in 1929-1931. It has been estimated that about 30-40% of the entire population died during some of the famines. This photograph is of the first 'food for work' project during famine in 1929 when people worked to excavate dams in *iishana* in return for food.¹⁵

¹ Derived from the mapping of individual households off aerial photographs taken in 2008, and by adding estimates of growth rates as measured between the 1991 and 2001 population and housing censuses.

² Keyler, S. 1995. *Economics of the pearl millet subsector in northern Namibia. A summary of baseline data*. International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics. *Working Paper 95/03*; Analysis of data in the 1994 and 2004 Income & Expenditure Surveys and Mendelsohn JM, el Obeid S & Roberts C. 2000. *A profile of north-central Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek.

³ Frieda Williams book

⁴ All rural households were mapped as points off aerial photographs taken in early 2008 by the European Union Rural Poverty Reduction Programme. Much of the mapping was done by the Central Bureau of Statistics, with additional mapping and checking by RAISON. Average household sizes were calculated for each enumeration area used in the population census of 2001 in Namibia, and these averages were applied to households in their respective enumeration areas. To account for population growth, the average household sizes were increased by an annual growth rate of 2%. Density estimates were generated by first creating a density map from the household points, using ArcView Spatial Analyst Density function, with a search distance of 1,000 metres and “Simple” density interpolation function. To this was added a grid file of urban population densities, and the resulting grid was then smoothed using the Neighbourhood Statistics function of Spatial Analyst.

Household mapping was also done in small urban areas where most households were visible. For larger urban areas, an annual growth rate of 5% was applied to population estimates from the 2001 Population & Housing Census. This approach was taken because of the difficulty in mapping households in the large informal settlements in the bigger towns.

⁵ From mapped households as described in endnote x.

⁶ From the results of population censuses conducted over the years as collated by Mendelsohn JM, el Obeid S & Roberts C. 2000. *A profile of north-central Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek, and updated with the results of the 2001 Population & Housing Census and density estimates described in endnote x.

⁷ Estimated by subtracting the grid densities for 2010 (as described above in endnote x) from a similar set of data compiled for 2000 by Mendelsohn JM, el Obeid S & Roberts C. 2000. *A profile of north-central Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek.

⁸ From Hipondoka M. 2008. *Boundaries of traditional authorities*. Unpublished report for the Ministry of Lands & Resettlement, Windhoek, and Mendelsohn JM, el Obeid S & Roberts C. 2000. *A profile of north-central Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek.

⁹ Results of the 1991 and 2001 Population & Housing Censuses as reported in Central Bureau of Statistics. 2010. *An atlas of Namibia's Population: monitoring and understanding its characteristics*. Central Bureau of Statistics, Windhoek.

¹⁰ Results of the 1991 and 2001 Population & Housing Censuses and the 2006 Intercensal Demographic Survey, as reported in Central Bureau of Statistics. 2010. *An atlas of Namibia's Population: monitoring and understanding its characteristics*. Central Bureau of Statistics, Windhoek.

¹¹ Results of the 1991 and 2001 Population & Housing Censuses and the 2006 Intercensal Demographic Survey, as reported in Central Bureau of Statistics. 2010. *An atlas of Namibia's Population: monitoring and understanding its characteristics*. Central Bureau of Statistics, Windhoek.

¹² Results of the 2001 Population & Housing Census and the 2006 Intercensal Demographic Survey, as reported in Central Bureau of Statistics. 2010. *An atlas of Namibia's Population: monitoring and understanding its characteristics*. Central Bureau of Statistics, Windhoek.

¹³ Derived from 2001 Population & Housing Census and 2004 Income & Expenditure Survey data analysed and prepared for the publication Central Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *An atlas of poverty in Namibia*. Central Bureau of Statistics, Windhoek.

¹⁴ As endnote 13/

¹⁵ Photo National Archives of Namibia