

Lower Orange River Social Survey – Vioolsdrift Dam Site

Locality Description

The proposed Vioolsdrift dam is situated approximately 20km upstream of the Vioolsdrift/ Noordoewer border post between South Africa and Namibia., where the Matjies River flows into the Orange River. The proposed dam pushes back past the settlement of Goodhouse, through to the mouth of the Houms River where the Orange River resumes normalised flow. The Vioolsdrift dam site falls within the area of the Namaqualand District council, with its regional seat in Springbok. Historically and administratively the settlements of Goodhouse and Henkries are closely related to the Steinkopf Local Council, Abbasas and Kabis falls under the jurisdiction of the Concordia Local Council.

The settlements of Noordoewer, Warmbad and Onseepkans within Namibia are the closest settlements to the proposed dam site. Approximately one fifth of the land on the Namibian side of the river along the Vioolsdrift dam site is owned by the state, while the remaining farms are privately owned (Namibian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1994).

Population/ Demography

The area under jurisdiction is sparsely populated, with sparse settlements almost entirely concentrated along the banks of the Orange River (e.g. Goodhouse and Vioolsdrift). Less than one sixth of the population from Vioolsdrift and Steinkopf through to Pella are found in the rural areas. This area is one of the least populated parts of the country, with rural densities around 0.2 people per km². The agricultural activities are also concentrated along the banks of the Orange River (except for livestock farming), due to the availability of water, and the warm climatic conditions.

Impacts

Vioolsdrift and Noordoewer

Ms Mosterd indicated that the irrigation scheme at Vioolsdrift dates back to the 1930's when women and children related to the road workers then employed in the area, started the irrigation project. The lack of transportation facilities, distance from markets, as well as the small-scale nature of the project, discouraged the government to assist the project financially. Subsequently, however, upgrading of the irrigation infrastructure has improved the capacity of the scheme. The Vioolsdrift/ Noordoewer Joint Irrigation Authority manages operating procedures regarding the canal system. Water allocation for irrigation comprises a total scheduled area of some 283ha in Namibia and 470ha in South Africa (Namibian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1994).

The productivity of the irrigation scheme is apparently limited by the availability of water and the capacity of the canal system. Assuming that the downstream irrigation water requirements for Noordoewer and Vioolsdrift can be secured, the potential

exist to extend the existing scheme and to increase food security downstream of the proposed dam on the South African and Namibian sides.

The proposed dam development options were discussed with various representatives of Vioolsdrift. During these discussions, it became apparent that residents of Vioolsdrift favourably receive the proposed development options. Mr Mosterd indicated that he favours the proposed dam development at Vioolsdrift and that he sees development as being in progress. He stressed the importance of these development options and the planning of development. The benefits of the proposed development option for irrigation farmers and rural areas were highlighted. The proposed development is regarded as creating opportunities, especially job opportunities. Development will lead to the economic development of the area and will ultimately lead to the development of the area.

Ms Mosterd indicated that there is an urgent need for the dirt road to Rooiwal to be upgraded and tarred. They also noted that the poor condition of the road has major financial implications for farmers, e.g. their vehicles are damaged. The impact of the dust is a major impact on their irrigation farming. The fact that this road serves as a major tourism route to the Richtersveld was highlighted. This should serve as a major motivation for the upgrade of the aforementioned road, they said.

Mr Danfred Vries, the school principal of Vioolsdrift Primary, highlighted the following potential benefits of the proposed development.

- The availability of water would lead to an increase in the production of food
- The development could lead to job creation opportunities for local community members

Mr Vries highlighted that currently conflict exists between irrigation farmers and the local “coloured” community because of the lack of a water distribution system. He expressed unhappiness about the fact that people have to be dependant on “ongesuiwerde” river water. He noted that the proposed development would be economically beneficial for the region.

Mr Vries pointed out that unemployment is a major problem in the area, because farmers changed their farming practices and is not dependant on farm labourers as before.

Mr Vries indicated that the water from the Orange River should be used for the people and to the their benefit to improve their lives. It is crucial that the local community should benefit from the proposed dam development. The local knowledge of people in Vioolsdrift should not be underestimated.

Ms Joyce van den Heever, the chairperson of the Local Development Forum, highlighted the problems the community currently experiences with water supply. She

noted that the proposed development could ultimately lead to increased agricultural activity and better food production. The development could in the short term lead to better job opportunities and increased self-esteem in local residents. The proposed development would provide locals with food and an income and other development opportunities could then be explored.

Currently, there exist a lot of conflict among farmers with regard to water rights and access to water from the Orange River. She noted that the Namakhoi Municipality recently gave the coloured community of Vioolsdrift piece of land, approximately 5km from the river, but they are suffering to be productive due to water supply problems. She noted that there is approximately 8 livestock farmers in Vioolsdrift, that suffer due to the water problems.

Ms van den Heever noted that the residents of Vioolsdrift had the opportunity to relocate to Vyfmyl, approximately 5km away, a few months ago. However, the older residents of the village decided that they would rather stay at their current location. According to Ms van den Heever the younger generation are keen to relocate to a place with better development opportunities, but the elders are adamant to stay in Vioolsdrift. According to Ms van den Heever, the Vioolsdrift community could only benefit from the proposed dam development options, as it would surely lead to development of the area and the community.

Doringwater

The farm Doringwater is located approximately 60km on the dirt road to Henkries. There are only 4 houses, occupied by men working at "waterraad" for the Springbok Mun. Informal discussions were held with Mr Markus and Mr Cloete. They were both informed of the study and the upcoming open day. Mr Markus and Cloete both felt that the propose project would lead to better development options for the area. They noted that they would like to see some kind of recreational facilities being developed as part of the project, i.e. fishing spots etc. They noted that they are definitely in favour of the development of a dam, but that the Vioolsdrift site should be prime priority, otherwise they would not benefit from it. However, hey did note that there would be serious implications to be considered like the possibility of floods and the potential loss of agricultural land. Mr Markus said that the road to Henkries is a major risk and is in an appalling state and could possibly be upgraded as part of the development.

Henkries

Approximately 60km north of Doringwater is the 50ha date plantation, Henkries, which originated from the 1st World War. The view that the potential for further development of the agricultural potential in the area appears to be high was shared with various representatives met during the site visit. Informal discussions were held with Mr G Cloete, Kobus Visagie, Ms P Oliphant and R Bok who represents the Henkries community on various organisations operating in the village. Generally they favoured the proposed dam development options and agreed that the local community could benefit through income opportunities being generated in the area.

Mr Cloete noted that the proposed dam could serve as an impetus for improving and upgrading the secondary services and infrastructure in the area. Further it could only be beneficial for the promotion of agricultural activities in the area. Mr Visagie, however, was of the opinion that the Henkries community does not need any additional job opportunities, as employment was not problematic for the locals. He noted his concern that there would probably be an influx of “outsiders” to the area as a result of the increased job opportunities. He noted that with the current infrastructure in place the water supply is sufficient and in his opinion additional water can easily be extracted from the river for irrigation purposes. Mr Visagie noted the possibility that some of the plantations might have to be moved and land would be lost due to the development of the dam. He stressed the fact that the Henkries community currently has an adequate supply of water and the development of the dam should be considered in detail.

Goodhouse

Discussions were held with Mr E Oliphant, the Chairperson of the Goodhouse Residents Committee. Mr Oliphant indicated that he was aware of the proposed project, but was not sure what the outcome of previous studies was. He noted that the Dept of Land Affairs in association with DWAF were currently busy implementing a development scheme for approximately 55 farmers in Goodhouse. He noted that 55ha land and a R5,5 million pump station was currently being build and developed as part of this project. He noted that once the project is being implemented, more land could be irrigated at a cheaper rate, allowing for more job opportunities for farmers. Mr Oliphant indicated that currently approximately 80% of the population is employed.

Mr Oliphant noted that he was in favour of the proposed dam development as long as the current developments were not jeopardised. He noted that the proposed dam would probably lead to increased economic development, and improved infrastructure and services. He noted that it would be favourable for the production of food and the upliftment of the local community.

Mr Oliphant, however, noted his concern that the cemetery would possibly be inundated. He said that the cemetery symbolise an important period in the history of Goodhouse and possibility of the exhumation of graves would not be considered as an option by the community. Mr Oliphant pointed out that there were relatively recent graves of members from the community. Mr Oliphant felt that it was crucial that other options should be looked at, in order not to affect the graveyard.

Mr Oliphant was of the opinion that the local residents would be opposed to the possibility of relocation. He noted that they were born and raised in Goodhouse and relocation was not an option.

He noted that better services were a need in the area, specifically communication services.

Pella

Discussions were held with the mayor of Pella, Onseepkans and Aggeneys, Pofadder and Witbank, Ms AG Beukes. Mrs Beukes noted that the above-noted communities would favourably receive the proposed development options. She noted that water is being abstracted from the Orange River at Onseepkans, but these “suiwerings” efforts are not very effective. She noted that with the proposed dam development options, the health risks would be significantly reduced and it would ultimately lead to healthier communities. She also said that the possibility then exists for water to become cheaper and food production would increase. Mrs Beukes is of the opinion that the perceptions of the local communities would change.

She noted that the obvious benefits of the dam development would be that the irrigation farmers would have better water supply and the regulation of water rights and would be more sufficiently regulated. She noted that currently a lot of indiscrepancies exist with regard to the abstraction of water from the Orange River. Mrs Beukes is of the opinion that the benefits would outweigh the disadvantages of developing the dam. However, the location of the dam and the quality of dam being built is issues of concern.

Conclusion

Informants were generally in favour of the proposed development and noted the infrastructural spin-offs that can be achieved via agricultural expansion. They also noted that the possibility that existing roads could be upgraded and new opportunities created through the improvement of road networks in the area.

The opportunity to broaden access to irrigatable land was noted as well as the potential for irrigation projects through improved water supply. Informants also noted the potential for increased food security. Informants also noted that the improved economic situation might lead to increased employment opportunities for locals both in the short term and long term.