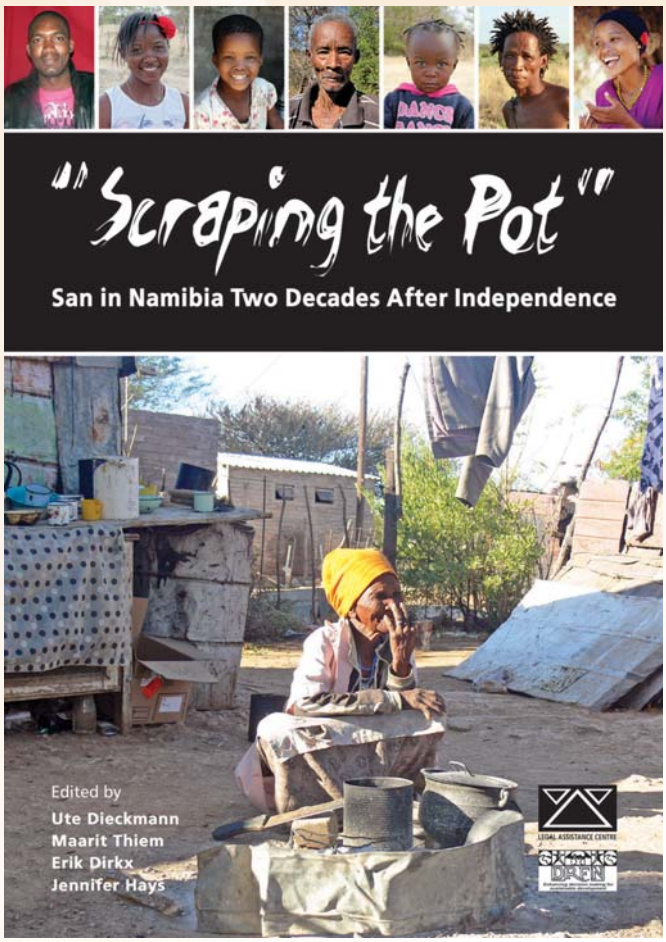


STUDY OVERVIEW

Reassessment of the Status of the San in Namibia (2010-2013)

"… I hope this comprehensive report will assist the people of Namibia to make further tangible progress to ensure that the human rights, cultures, languages and livelihoods of all of the people of Africa are respected, especially its oldest inhabitants."

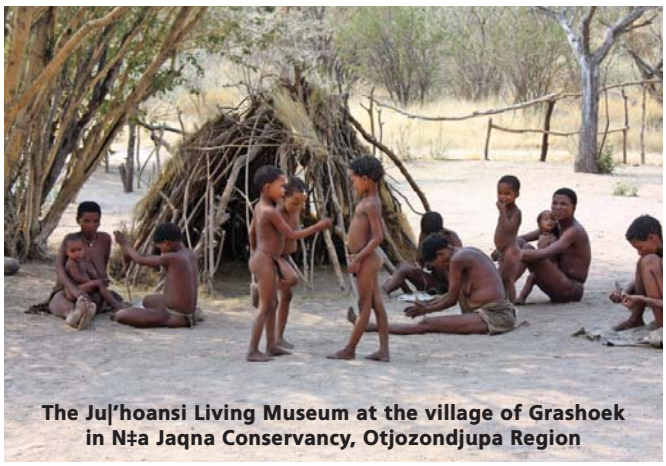
– **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**,
"Foreword", *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia Two Decades After Independence*, 2014

"This study report is a stark reminder of the situation in which the San people live, and I trust that it will be widely distributed to gain societal understanding and appreciation of the need for specific legislation, programmes and projects aimed at ensuring equal enjoyment of all human rights and improvement of the lives of the San people."

– **Adv. John Walters**, Ombudsman, Namibia
"Preface", *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia Two Decades After Independence*, 2014

Who are the San in Namibia?

Namibia's San population constitutes about 2% of the national population. Numbering between 27 000 and 38 000 people in total, the overarching category known as "San", denoting former hunter-gatherer communities, includes several different ethnic groups with distinct languages and dialects. In general, San individuals identify themselves according to their ethnic group, i.e. Ju|'hoansi, !Xun (or !Kung), Hai||om, Naro, Khwe or !Xoon, rather than as "San" (a generally accepted political label), which is, like "Bushmen", an external term. The San live on commercial farms, on resettlement farms, in communal areas among other ethnic majorities, in conservancies or community forests, in national parks and in urban townships. The socio-economic situations in which San groups/families/individuals currently live differ in many respects, depending primarily on the geographical region and the form of land tenure. Despite these variations, all of the San groups share both a history and current experience of marginalisation. The level of poverty of the San is unmatched by that of any other group in Namibia. In the Human Development Index they are ranked at 0.35, whereas the national average is 0.55 (Levine 2007: 17).


The Ju|'hoansi Living Museum at the village of Grashoek in N‡a Jaqna Conservancy, Otjozondjupa Region

A San homestead in Omaheke Region

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The "Reassessment of the Status of the San in Namibia" (hereinafter referred to by the short title, "San Study") was initiated in 2010 with the aim of reassessing the situation of the San 10 years after the last comprehensive study on the San in this country (*An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia,* James Suzman, 2001). The overall objective of the San Study of 2010-2013 was to provide wide-ranging data on the different San groups in Namibia, and to paint a comprehensive picture of the challenges that Namibia's San communities face. The findings will help stakeholders such as the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), NGOs and multilateral partners to improve the quality of the design and implementation of projects aimed at improving the status of the San, and to develop an integrated strategy for future support to the San. The study report, *"Scraping the Pot": San in Namibia Two Decades After Independence*, provides reliable data and a sound empirical foundation for policymaking and future San support programmes.

Since 2001 when the report on the previous assessment of the San was published (Suzman 2001), diverse development initiatives aimed at reducing the severe poverty of the San communities have been implemented or initiated. The Government of Namibia has taken a number of measures to end the discrimination of San and address their depressed socio-economic situation.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Dr Libertina Amathila took a special interest in the welfare of the San.

Most important of these measures is the San Development Programme (SDP) established in late 2005, run by the Division of San Development in the OPM. Also, many NGOs have increased their support for San over the last decade. The existence of a specific government office dedicated to ameliorating the situation of San communities provides a promising framework for empowering these communities. Furthermore, Namibia's Fourth National Development Plan 2012/2013-2016/2017 (NDP4) takes cognisance of the welfare of the San – in Chapter 8 which deals with alleviating extreme poverty (NPC 2012: 62-69).

THE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The research team – comprising staff members, interns and consultants of the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) – visited a total of 42 sites in 10 of Namibia's 14 regions, namely Kavango East, Kavango West, Kunene, Ohangwena, Omaheke, Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa and Zambezi.[1] The selection of the research sites was based on specific criteria: ethnic groups; livelihood contexts; land tenure systems; minority vs majority ethnic status; and institutional support.

Four participatory research methods were used in the field: village resource map; wealth ranking; food security pathway; and timeline. Focus group discussions (FGDs) on the following topics supplemented the participatory research methods: access to land and resources, health, education and social support networks; consultation, participation and representation; and visions for the future. The research methodology also included stakeholder interviews and a literature review.

!Xun at Likwaterera, Kavango, constructing a village resource map

An FGD with Hai||om women at Oshivelo, Oshikoto Region

[1] At the time of the field research, Zambezi Region was still named Caprivi Region, and Kavango Region had not yet been divided into Kavango East and Kavango West, thus the study report refers to "Caprivi Region" and "Kavango Region".

Marginal livelihoods

In short, the San's overall access to food and income is highly insecure. The majority of San households at most of the sites depend to a substantial degree on government support for their survival. The Old Age Pension (N$600 per month at the time of writing) is the most common and most consistent source of income in Namibia's San communities, and for many of them, food aid is the most reliable source of food. Research participants reported a high degree of reliance on both of these sources for their survival.

In addition, San communities and individuals employ a variety of strategies to secure small amounts of cash (or in some cases food), including casual work (often seasonal) and piecework for members of neighbouring groups, depending on circumstances and availability. The sale of natural products or crafts occasionally brings additional though minimal income. Some individuals attempt to acquire extra income by engaging in business on a very small scale – for example, purchasing food items at a shop and re-selling them in smaller quantities at home, or producing and selling snacks such as *vetkoek* ('fat cakes') or homemade ice.

Other San livelihood strategies are focused directly on gaining access to a food source. Gathering of bush-food is still a very important livelihood strategy for San communities, but it is highly seasonal and limited in most areas by a lack of access to land. Despite various efforts undertaken by stakeholders – and despite the aspirations of the San themselves – to improve San livelihoods through animal husbandry, this livelihood strategy plays a minor role in most San communities.

Some San communities cultivate crops, but only on a relatively small scale, and this strategy is dependent on environmental circumstances, access to land and external support. Harvests are usually consumed within a couple of days, weeks or months; they do not suffice to provide households with staple food for an entire year. NGOs support crop cultivation on a larger scale, and this has contributed to improving food security, but sustainability has yet to be achieved. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the San participating in the research generally regarded access to crop fields and agricultural implements as essential for reducing poverty.

Likewise, research participants generally regarded ownership of large numbers of livestock (particularly large stock) as a means to avoid poverty, but ownership of large herds was generally perceived as the exclusive preserve of members of other ethnic groups.

Formal employment was viewed as a major determinant of security, chiefly because it offers regular cash income in the form of a salary/wage that could also be used to invest in other assets (e.g. livestock and fencing material). However, many research participants reported that members of other ethnic groups were more likely to receive formal jobs.

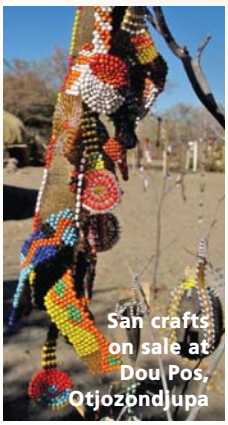
San harvesting Devil's Claw at Donkerbos-Sonneblom Resettlement Project in Omaheke Region

Otjozondjupa

Ohangwena

Caprivi

One success story: the Art-i-San range of textiles


San crafts on sale at Dou Pos, Otjozondjupa

These are all relevant findings which should be taken into consideration in future programme planning and implementation.

Marginalisation – key contributing factors

The widespread marginalisation of San is attributable to a combination of factors which are interrelated and partly conditional upon each other. The study brought to light the key factors:

- lack of access to land / lack of secure land tenure;
- limited post-settlement support / lack of access to productive assets;
- discrimination relating to culture;
- very low levels of education;
- limited political representation, participation and consultation.

Lack of access to land / lack of secure land tenure

> ***"The Government of Namibia should step up efforts to address the problem of landlessness of San groups and to carry out initiatives to secure for them rights to land and do so, to the extent compatible with the rights of others, in accordance with their historical or traditional land tenure patterns."***
>
> – **James Anaya**, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2013, p. 19

The vast majority of San households do not have secure land rights. As is the case for most of the other (rural) Namibian communities, access to land is critical for many San households, especially those in remote areas, but it is even more important for the San because their generally low educational qualifications limit their employment opportunities. *Securing land rights is one of the most urgent issues to address* in respect of the San in Namibia.

Access to land has improved somewhat for a few of Namibia's San communities since 2001:

- N‡a Jaqna Conservancy in Otjozondjupa Region was gazetted in 2003;
- San and non-San residents of Zambezi and Kavango Regions were granted user rights in the Bwabwata National Park (BNP) as of 2006; and
- under the OPM's SDP, several resettlement farms have been purchased for some San communities in Kunene, Oshikoto and Otjozondjupa.

However, even the communities with access to land face serious threats at present, above all the influx of outsiders with livestock and illegal fencing.

For many San communities, access to land and natural resources has been reduced or threatened since 2001:

- for the !Xun and Ju|'hoansi in Kavango, access to land is threatened by the development of small-scale farms;
- Hai||om on Farm Six in Oshikoto lost access to land and resources when a large part of their land was allocated to Owambo farmers and their cattle; and
- many San communities in communal areas (particularly in Ohangwena and Omaheke) lost access to land due to (illegal) fencing of large tracts of land.

Agricultural training at Donkerbos-Sonneblom, Omaheke

Limited post-settlement support / lack of access to productive assets

Since Namibia's Independence in 1990, resettlement has been viewed as a promising step towards alleviating the problem of landlessness among the San. However, this study has shown that within the group resettlement scheme approach employed by the government, the San face specific challenges associated with their high levels of illiteracy, their cultural background and their recent history of marginalisation. Also, generally acknowledged constraints to common property resource management play an important role. These four challenges require comprehensive strategies for post-settlement support for the San living in group resettlement projects, which take cognisance of the need to strengthen their technical and collaborative capacity for resource management. One can state that the government's continued focus on group resettlement schemes – in recent years promoted by the OPM for the San – and the strategies employed in these projects, have not necessarily paid adequate attention to:

- technical and collaborative management capacity, which is needed to turn vulnerable farmers like the San into productive farmers; and
- structural constraints associated with high levels of illiteracy, common property management problems, remoteness and market inaccessibility.

The virtual absence of adequate and comprehensive agricultural support services for the San living on remote group resettlement farms or in remote parts of the northern and eastern communal areas implies that those San interested in improving their living conditions through farming are forced to rely on their own often limited means, which generally results in a low-input-and-low-output type of farming, with very meagre returns.

Discrimination relating to culture

Most San participants in the research reported experiencing discrimination at the hands of 'others' in Namibian society, including public servants, and they cited many examples (e.g. in the education and health sectors, other public services and the formal job market) to illustrate how discrimination contributes to San poverty and marginalisation. Discrimination against San in the past and today stems in part from the perception that they are 'primitive' or 'uncivilised' – as interviews and informal discussions with stakeholders revealed. Many outsiders are ignorant about San cultures and traditions, and this ignorance leads many to perceive the San way of life as 'backwards' and thus something to be overcome, rather than as a resource to be incorporated and built upon. This discrimination clearly has a negative impact on their self-esteem, their access to public services, their political participation and representation, their educational achievements and their employment opportunities.

This study has found that the lack of information and consequent widespread lack of knowledge about certain

lesser-known but fundamental aspects of all San cultures are posing obstacles to San development. It is crucially important that some of the fundamental aspects of San culture (e.g. egalitarian values and the moral obligation to share) are taken into account in the planning and implementation of any San development initiative.

Low levels of education

Indisputably the extremely low levels of education among the San feed into the cycle of poverty in which San communities find themselves. Namibia's education policies are progressive in terms of meeting the educational requirements of minority groups, but not all of these policies are enforced, and the reality on the ground still reflects gross inequalities in educational access and attainment. Recent quantitative research (i.e. data provided by the Education Management Information System, MoE 2010: 40) consistently shows that San groups are by far the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in the system. This study has confirmed this statistical picture; it has found that although most (but far from all) San children enrol in the lower-primary grades, there is a sharp decline in their enrolment in upper-primary and secondary school grades. The reasons that research participants cited for the high and early dropout rates among San learners reflect an interplay of economic, cultural and social factors. The key reasons across the research sites indicate that the root causes are much the same for all San groups:

- poverty;
- discrimination;
- remoteness;
- cultural mismatch (language and differences in cultural and social practices);
- inappropriate curricula;
- a lack of role models; and
- teenage pregnancy.

The generally low level of education severely affects the economic situation of the San. They cannot compete in the formal job market and hence are highly dependent on menial work. Difficulties persist in accessing information, dealing with official paperwork, and developing skills, capacities and the confidence to secure legal rights. This situation begets a vicious cycle of poverty that very few San are able to escape.

The ‡Otcaqkxai Village School in Nyae Nyae, Otjozondjupa

In 2013, the compulsory contribution to the School Development Fund (SDF) was abolished in all public primary schools, thereby rendering primary education free of charge (in principle) for all learners in these schools. Although the abolition of these school fees will help in general, many San families will still be financially incapable of covering other school-related costs.

Also, free primary education is unlikely to impact on the pattern of dropout at the start of secondary school, and on the extremely low levels of San enrolment in tertiary education. The government recently announced its plan to offer free secondary education, but probably only in 2016 (*New Era*, Jemima Beukes, 14 March 2014).

Improving the educational and economic situations of the San is not only about access to mainstream education; it is also about 'appropriate education', or education that is adapted to the needs of the San children and their communities. Such adapted education would be rooted in San cultural values, and would recognise and build on their own knowledge foundations, and would also offer an appropriate living environment while at school – an alternative to the unfamiliar environment of a school hostel, especially at secondary school. Furthermore, the issue of mother-tongue education is critical: San children are extremely disadvantaged in this regard in Namibia's schools today.

A quality education for San children and communities would be one that takes all of these elements into consideration, and which – most importantly – responds to the specific needs, aspirations, cultures and realities of the respective communities served.

Limited political representation, participation and consultation

The San are seriously under-represented in most political structures in Namibia. At the time of writing, there are no San Members of Parliament, and there is only one San Regional Councillor (a Ju|'hoan woman in Tsumkwe).

The San are under-represented in local and regional structures such as community development committees, water-point committees, school boards and regional development coordinating committees, and where they do participate, they often feel that they are not listened to and are not respected. Research participants stated that most San do vote, but do not feel that they are able to make any real difference in Namibian society. Thus it appears that most San do not experience the feeling of participating as citizens in a democratic country.

Over the last 15 years – especially since the inception of the OPM's SDP in 2005 – the government has increased its efforts to guarantee the representation, consultation and participation of the country's San, primarily through the recognition of five San Traditional Authorities (TAs): the Hai||om TA in Kunene, Oshikoto and Oshana Regions;

San chiefs in Windhoek in 2008

the !Xun and Ju|'hoan TAs in Otjozondjupa; the Ju|'hoan TA in northern Omaheke; and the !Xoon TA in southern Omaheke. Indeed, the government has regularly consulted these officially recognised San TAs on development issues in their respective communities.

Nevertheless, simply having a TA does not guarantee effective political representation. Some San communities do not fully accept their TAs; three of the five recognised TAs face serious challenges in respect of community support. Common complaints that research participants at the relevant sites levelled at their respective TAs were: nepotism; a lack of transparency and communication; pursuing personal interests instead of community development; and corruption. These issues of conflict between communities and their TAs are at least partly due to the fact that the TA as an institution does not accommodate the traditional leadership structures of San societies. Until recently these societies were founded on egalitarian values, and they lacked a strong internal hierarchical structure with formal leadership roles – because such a model did not accord with their way of life.

Furthermore, the San in Kavango East and West, Zambezi, Omusati and Ohangwena do not have their own government-recognised TAs, but instead fall under the jurisdiction of other TAs, depending on where they reside in these regions. Therefore, at least a third of all San in Namibia have no recognised TA representing their interests as San at national level.

Aware of the shortcomings of the TA system for San representation, the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) facilitated the establishment of the Namibian San Council in 2006, so as to create a second representative body to advocate on behalf of the San communities. In 2012/13 the council members attended a series of capacity-building workshops. It remains to be seen whether this body can effectively represent the San at the national and international levels.

The leadership issue is connected to all of the aforementioned issues. Effective and culturally appropriate representative leadership structures would give the San a stronger voice to address the issues affecting them, such as land allocation, education and discrimination.

Although a few San TAs have been recognised and the Namibian San Council has been established in the years since 2001, adequate political representation, participation and consultation is still a long way off. This is a pressing matter which has to be addressed to achieve long-term results in respect of San empowerment and development.

Gender

Another major and overarching concern is the lack of gender mainstreaming in many programmes and projects targeting San. Faced with the San communities' extreme poverty, stakeholders often ignore the gender issue in their efforts to improve the livelihoods of *all* members of a community. This study has shown that gender inequality in San communities has increased tremendously over the last two or three decades, with the following corresponding problems arising and escalating over time:

- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** Often triggered by alcohol abuse, GBV is a major problem in most San communities today, and is attributable to a number of prior interrelated problems. Changes in gender ideologies as communities shift towards a hierarchical model whereby men are 'superior' to women (still generally the dominant model in Namibian communities), and men's frustration with unemployment and poverty, are major causes of the increased violence. The lack of law enforcement compounds the problem of GBV.
- **Formal education:** Completion of formal education is a challenge for both boys and girls in San communities, but girls are more disadvantaged than boys in the sphere of formal education, the key factors being sexual harassment, the need for more financial resources to buy toiletries (including sanitary items, which are not cheap), teenage pregnancy and early marriage, and lower self-esteem.
- **Health:** San women are in a more vulnerable position than San men with regard to health, not least because women tend to be the ones who take care of the health of other family members. In addition, all the issues around accessing healthcare facilities and trained personnel during pregnancy and childbirth place women at a higher risk of complications and emergencies in the reproductive period of their lives. Those San women who engage in exploitative sexual relationships with (economically better-off) non-San men are also highly vulnerable to exposure to HIV infection.

This study has made evident that a concerted effort to mainstream a gender perspective in all San development initiatives is urgently needed. By failing to implement gender mainstreaming thoroughly, stakeholders in San empowerment and development risk broadening the stratification along gender lines in San communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

This study has brought to light the diverse and interrelated factors causing and maintaining the marginalisation and poverty of Namibia's San communities. It has also made possible the formulation of region- and topic-specific recommendations. The participatory approach employed in the study has enabled us to identify many reasons for the lack of success of government and NGO initiatives aimed at reducing the levels of San marginalisation and poverty. Major cross-cutting issues (i.e. issues relevant to all regions and all topics) are ***the lack of***:

- an integrated strategy;
- a focus on empowerment;
- coordination between stakeholders;
- participatory involvement and consultation at all stages of project implementation;
- cultural sensitivity in the design and implementation of projects;
- long-term initiatives and commitment, including a local presence at grassroots level;
- adequate monitoring and evaluation of projects; and
- organisational capacity building.

All these issues would be dealt with by implementing the following recommendations.

Developing an integrated strategy

Currently, different stakeholders, taking different approaches, are imposing different development strategies on Namibia's San communities. Without an *integrated* strategy, initiatives supporting San will remain patchy and rather ineffective, and stakeholders will continue to risk impeding each other's efforts.

A major step towards addressing this concern would be the development and adoption of **a specific policy on indigenous peoples / marginalised communities in Namibia**. This would give stakeholders a common set of guidelines to direct their development efforts, and would inculcate a rights-based approach to development. The UN has already recommended such a policy in its *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Namibia* (UN General Assembly 2011: 18). Namibia has accepted this recommendation along with all others in this UN review report, and the Office of the Ombudsman is in the process of developing a first draft of this white paper. It is recommended that the findings of this study be taken into account in this process.

Further, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has recommended that Namibia ratify ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO169) (ACHPR and IWGIA 2008: 26). This would be a major step forward, and could go hand in hand with the policy recommended above. Along with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO169 would reinforce the protection and recognition of indigenous minorities at national level. Furthermore, ILO169 and UNDRIP provide frameworks for Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which could go a long way to addressing the shortcomings in consultation, empowerment, cultural sensitivity and oganisational capacity described above.

Improving coordination

This study has made clear that uncoordinated efforts by various stakeholders are counterproductive for development initiatives. In this regard, a **National Coordinating Forum on Indigenous Peoples / Marginalised Communities** should be established to ensure integrated, multi-sectoral, coordinated and systematic development, in line with the recommended integrated strategy. This forum should be composed of representatives of the San TAs, the Namibian San Council, the OPM's SDP, the relevant line ministries, national NGOs and international development partners.

Further, **Regional Coordinating Committees on Indigenous Peoples / Marginalised Communities** could be established, which could deal in more detail with the specific problems of San in each region. Such committees should include representatives of the OPM, regional councils, line ministries, NGOs working with the San in each region, San TAs and/or other TAs under whose jurisdiction the San live, regional representatives of the Namibian San Council and representatives of San CBOs.

Improving monitoring and evaluation

Quantitative data is essential for adequately evaluating, in detail, poverty reduction and other development efforts. Quantitative data would also be a means to compare the wellbeing of San communities with that of other Namibian communities. Undeniably, 24 years after Independence, ethnic affiliations still play a role in the redistribution of wealth and resources in Namibia (see also Daniels 2004: 44). Quantitative data on the basis of language categories as provided by the National Planning Commission or the Namibia Statistics Agency do not reliably capture socio-economic differences between ethnic groups such as the San groups and the Himba (another marginalised indigenous group in Namibia). The government can provide comprehensive and reliable quantitative data, and we urge the government to (a) include in the census and various survey questionnaires one question on ethnic affiliation, and (b) analyse specific data accordingly, or otherwise make the data accessible to others for analysis. This recommendation is in line with recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

(CERD 2008: 6) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 2007: 2).

Attention to San communities with little external support

Perhaps the most difficult issue to address is that of the high number of San communities and individuals who are 'falling through the cracks' and receiving very little or no attention and external support. These communities and individuals are, inter alia, San living in extreme geographical marginalisation (e.g. on Farm Six in Oshikoto Region and in the Eiseb Block in Omaheke Region), San living in townships (e.g. Epako in Gobabis, Omaheke), San working on commercial farms and San living in communal areas where other ethnic groups are the majority populations (e.g. in parts of Omaheke, Ohangwena and Kavango). The study has found these communities and individuals to be among the poorest San in Namibia. They need urgent attention and support. Better access to public services, improved infrastructure, organisational capacity building and awareness campaigns on human rights and the channels to be followed to secure these rights would be first steps, and just these steps would have a considerable impact on improving the current living conditions of the people concerned.

The Hai||om kindergarten supported by WIMSA in Outjo, Kunene

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study report is intended to provide a solid basis for future policies, programmes and projects for *and with* San communities in Namibia, so as to finally ensure that San communities have equal opportunities and enjoy equal rights in Namibian society. The report makes clear that concerted efforts are needed. Improving the situation will depend on the political will and commitment of the Government of Namibia, the commitment and capacity of civil society, and last but not least, the initiative and advocacy of the San themselves.

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LAC: 4 Marien Ngouabi Street, Windhoek • Tel. 061-223356
Email info@lac.org.na • Website www.lac.org.na