

# Chapter 16

# Education

By Maarit Thiem and Jennifer Hays

**“San empowerment and education must be given first priority.”**

– Moses ||Khumub, member of the Namibian San Council, San Study National Feedback Workshop, April 2013



A class in the #Otcaqkxai Village School, Otjozondjupa Region

## 16.1 Introduction

In the San Study National Stakeholder Workshop held in Windhoek in April 2013, participants emphasised the critical importance of education for empowering the San and for enabling them to determine their own development. In his opening address to the workshop, Namibian San Council member Moses ||Khumub explained why the San Council regards education as a “first priority”:

**“Educated and empowered people can lead their own development, and San people are no exception. If San people are not empowered and do not take the initiative ... their current dependency will remain the same.”**

Similar sentiments were expressed over and over throughout our field research. Education – and whether or not one has access to it – plays a central role both in the current marginalisation of the San and in their hopes of gaining control over their own circumstances.

Namibia has some of the most progressive and most inclusive education policies in Africa. Yet, at virtually all of the research sites visited for this study, access to quality education was identified as one of the most pressing problems that the San communities face.

Both male and female San adults have very low levels of education. At most (not all) of the sites visited, we collected information on the level of education of individual participants and their children, including the reasons for their generally low level of education. The data collected is not representative due to certain factors being beyond our control, such as the inconsistent numbers of discussion participants per site – some groups were small and some were large – and the fact that many people, especially the elderly, did not know their own age nor their children’s ages. We collected education-related information from 609 individuals in total. Although our multivariate data analysis does not provide a representative picture of school attendance due to the small sample of cases, some trends are worth presenting here in brief.

Approximately 50% of the participants overall had never attended school. Among those who had attended school, the gender disparity was minimal, and was linked primarily to age: among those aged 28 and older, more males than females had attended school, whereas among those younger than 28, more females than males had attended or were still attending school.<sup>1</sup> A large majority (about 90%) of those who had attended school had dropped out before receiving a certificate, and the average grade in which they had dropped out was lower among the group aged 28 and older.

Both San and non-San respondents perceived the low levels of school attendance as a major obstacle to improving San communities’ economic situation, and to their achieving a social and political status equating to that of other Namibians. Focus group discussion (FGD) participants identified a range of barriers to education, chief among which were: a lack of schools nearby; mistreatment by teachers and other learners; a lack of food; a lack of money to pay school fees and other education-related costs; and language difficulties. Non-San respondents repeatedly confirmed these and other factors, and the low level of San participation in Namibia’s formal education system is illustrated statistically in education-related data collected by the government.

In the following subsections we briefly discuss international standards and declarations pertaining to education, and Namibian education and language policies and their relevance to San learners, and then compare the ideals expressed in these international and national instruments to the San experience of education as reported by San at our research sites. Then, elaborating on the barriers cited above, we describe in detail the main barriers to participation in formal education faced by San individuals and communities. Finally, we draw conclusions and offer recommendations for improving the educational status of the San in Namibia.

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<sup>1</sup> Those aged 28 and older attended school before Independence, and those younger than 28 attended school after Independence, so we have divided the San participants in our research discussions into these two categories.

## 16.1.1 Education as a right

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UN General Assembly (UNGA) 1948) declares education to be a fundamental human right. Article 26 asserts that every person has the right to education, and that elementary education should be free and compulsory. Several other international declarations, conventions and documents invoke this fundamental right to education, including the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights** (Article 17(1)) (Organisation of African Unity (OAU) 1981) and the **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** (Article 11) (OAU 1990).

The **World Conference on Education for All**, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, laid the foundation for a global commitment to providing quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. The conference participants, including Namibia, "... endorsed an 'expanded vision of learning' and pledged to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade".<sup>2</sup> The **World Education Forum**, meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, reaffirmed this international initiative of "Education for All (EFA)".

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (1998-2004), Katarina Tomaševski, defined the right to education as an 'enabling right', in addition to being a right in itself:

"If people have access to education they can develop the skills, capacity and confidence to secure other rights. Education gives people the ability to access information detailing the range of rights that they hold, and government's obligations. It supports people to develop the communication skills to demand these rights, the confidence to speak in a variety of forums, and the ability to negotiate with a wide range of government officials and power holders."<sup>3</sup> (Also cited in Hays 2011: 131)

In addition to the international instruments that affirm *all people's* right to education, there are several international declarations, conventions and documents that recognise the education rights of *indigenous peoples* specifically. These include indigenous rights instruments – notably the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** (UNGA 2007) and **International Labour Organization Convention No. 169** (ILO169) (1989) – and general rights instruments that refer to indigenous education, including the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNGA 1989), the **World Declaration on Education for All** (World Education Forum 1990) and the **Dakar Framework for Action** (World Education Forum 2000).<sup>4</sup> All these instruments acknowledge that indigenous communities have suffered from exclusion from mainstream education systems, as well as from restricted participation in these systems.

At the core of indigenous education rights is the right to educational self-determination. Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples describes this as follows:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."<sup>5</sup>

For San communities, this right is still very far from being fulfilled.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Education For All: History", accessed at [www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/the-efa-movement/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/the-efa-movement/).

<sup>3</sup> Right to Education Project, "Defining the right to education", accessed at [www.right-to-education.org/node/233](http://www.right-to-education.org/node/233).

<sup>4</sup> Namibia is a party to all of these agreements except the ILO Convention No. 169.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion on education-related rights connected to indigenous rights in southern Africa, see Hays 2011.

## 16.1.2 Education and language policy in Namibia

Some of the problems that the San of Namibia experience in accessing education are rooted in the country's history. The colonial administration of the Territory of South West Africa (SWA – now the Republic of Namibia) fostered the view that formal education would be wasted on the San, hence very few schools were built in the areas where San lived, and little effort was made to encourage San children to acquire a formal education (Suzman 2001b: 124). Consequently, by 1984, only one in 20 San had received any formal education, and only one San learner in all of SWA had attended school for longer than seven years (Marais 1984: 62). With the deployment of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in West Caprivi and Bushmanland, the rate of enrolment of San in formal schools increased throughout the 1980s, but still remained lower than for other ethnic groups. This historical legacy is still evident today: the educational level of elderly San people is generally extremely low, the majority being unable to read or write at all.

After Namibia attained its independence in 1990, the new government introduced an education system aimed at overcoming racial segregation by offering equal education to all. **Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution** guarantees and defines the right to education. Furthermore, it stipulates that primary education should be compulsory, and charges the State with providing reasonable facilities to render effective this right for every Namibian resident. **Article 9** guarantees the cultural rights of people, and **Article 3** the right to use a language other than English as a medium of instruction. These constitutional rights laid the foundation for a range of national policies to secure equal access to education.

The **Language Policy for Schools in Namibia**, adopted in 1991 and revisited in 2003 (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC) 2003), calls for the learners' mother tongue to be the medium of instruction during the first three years of formal education, with a transition to English thereafter, and the teaching of the mother tongue as a subject throughout the remaining years of formal education (Davids 2011: 128). This policy also recognises the importance of minority languages and the pedagogical soundness of mother-tongue education, noting that "all national languages regardless of number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language" are equal, and that any given language is also "a means of transmitting culture and cultural identity" (MBESC 2003: 1; see also Hopson 2011 and Ninkova 2009).

Despite the increasing enrolment rate nationally in the years following independence, there was a growing 'enrolment gap' in specific sectors of society. In 1996, recognising that specific affirmative action efforts were required to reach educationally marginalised children and to ensure universal access to education as the Constitution prescribes, the MBESC established the Intersectoral Task Force for Educationally Marginalised Children, which functioned as a steering committee for overseeing the implementation of policies on education and addressing specific needs (Von Wietersheim 2002: 3).

In particular, the task force addressed the recommendations of the *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children* document which was drafted in the mid-to-late 1990s, finalised in 2000 and released as a full-fledged policy in 2001 (MBESC 2000). This remains Namibia's most progressive policy on education. It is extremely far-reaching, and is the most relevant policy for San learners. It identifies 13 educationally marginalised groups, including the San as an ethnic group,<sup>6</sup> but San children are also part of other marginalised groups identified in the policy – especially

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<sup>6</sup> The San and the Himba are the only ethnic groups included in the 13 categories.

farmworkers, street children, working children, children in squatter areas and resettlement camps, children living in extreme poverty, and over-age children. The policy recognises that the San, as an educationally marginalised group, face difficulties in accessing basic education, drop out of school prematurely and/or are “pushed out of from the formal education system by the system itself” (MBESC 2000: 2).

This policy provides concrete directions for overcoming the two barriers identified as the main barriers: poverty and attitudes. For example, to reduce the financial difficulties that marginalised groups encounter, an exemption from school fees and the wearing of school uniforms is advised. (This issue was also taken up in the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children 2006-2010 – see subsection 16.2.1 on poverty.) In the years immediately following the adoption of the *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children* as a policy per se, the Intersectoral Task Force monitored efforts to implement the changes, and educational programmes targeting San and Himba children specifically. However, this task force has been dormant since 2004 when education was decentralised to the regional education offices.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed a **Sector Policy on Inclusive Education**, which defines inclusive education (in line with UNESCO’s description) as –

“... a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from the education system” (MoE 2012a: iii).

The policy of 2012 refers to the *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children* (MBESC 2000) in several places. Unlike the latter, the 2012 policy document makes no reference to the San or any other ethnic minority specifically, but its spirit is much the same, with the list of guiding principles including, inter alia: identifying and addressing challenges and/or barriers within the education system; inculcating flexible and differentiated teaching and learning approaches; engaging schools and communities on the issues of human and educational rights; diversifying the curriculum; and creating a positive climate for diversity.

Compared to education policies in other countries in southern Africa, Namibia’s policies are the most progressive in terms of meeting the educational requirements of its minorities. Regrettably, however, not all of these policies are enforced, and the reality on the ground still reflects gross inequalities in access to education and the levels attained. The reasons for the lack of enforcement are not entirely clear, but this is a problem that affects the country in general. The Fourth National Development Plan (NDP4) highlights the fact that the education sector receives the largest portion of the national budget, but that educational achievements remain weak compared to international standards. NDP4 identifies two main challenges with regard to education: “... quality in the system across all layers and segments, and the mismatch between the demand for and supply of skills in the country” (National Planning Commission 2012a: 46).

However, despite the laudable efforts to increase the participation of all Namibian citizens in the formal education system, our research has consistently made clear that in this system, the San are by far the most disadvantaged of all ethnic groups. The Education Management Information System (EMIS) shows that San enrolment in formal education is far below the national average. Twenty-three years after Independence, the San enrolment figures are striking: 67% in the lower primary phase (Grades 1-3); 22% in the upper primary phase (Grades 4-7); 6% in the junior secondary phase (Grades 8-9); and less than 1% in the senior secondary phase (Grades 11-12) (MoE 2010: 40; see also Davids 2011: 127).

### 16.1.3 Overview of San Study findings

Our research has confirmed the statistical picture presented in the previous paragraph. We found that a majority of San children – though far from all – are enrolled in the lower primary grades, especially if there is a primary school in their vicinity. Our data also reaffirms the sharp decline in San enrolment in upper primary and higher grades revealed by the EMIS statistics (MoE 2010): 36% of our FGD participants' children had dropped out by Grade 4, and over half (55.2%) by Grade 6. The participants' explanations for these high and early dropout rates were manifold, and they reflect an interplay of economic, cultural and social factors. Nevertheless, a number of explanations were similar across the research sites, indicating that the applicable root causes (discussed below) are the same for all San groups. On the other hand, certain differences between sites could be identified, and these are revealing. The findings in Ohangwena Region, and at a particular school in Tsumkwe West in Otjozondjupa Region, represent the extremes found in our research, as described below.

**Ohangwena Region:** The situation of San learners in this region was said to be particularly difficult. Indeed, we found a much lower rate of participation in education here than the average across the sites, with a high number of San children not enrolled in school at all. FGD participants in this region attributed this low rate of participation to widespread alcoholism, teenage pregnancy and early marriage, and reports of bullying and threats in hostels. According to FGD participants, San parents in Ohangwena are very passive vis-à-vis supporting their children's school attendance. This whole situation is a reflection of the generally difficult living conditions of the San in Ohangwena, and the fact that they were living together with more dominant ethnic groups, into which they were assimilating as a sub-class, and were on the verge of losing their own identity. For example, it was very difficult to obtain information on the school fee exemption and other ways for San to access financial support for education, in part because the San in this region did not have their own traditional authority (TA) that could disseminate such information to them and assist them with the bureaucratic procedures involved.

**Tsumkwe West (Nꞛa Jaqna Conservancy, Otjozondjupa Region):** In the village of Mangetti Dune, the younger FGD participants showed a much higher degree of self-confidence than those at other sites. They participated actively in the discussions, articulated their own opinions, and most of them were able to understand English well and express themselves in English. There is a primary school catering for Grades 1-7 within this village, and the language of instruction is a mix of English (primarily) with some Afrikaans. The !Xun learners constitute the majority in the school, and discrimination was not mentioned as an issue. Two important factors stand out here in contrast to many other sites: (1) the close proximity of the school, which enables most learners – in Mangetti Dune and other local villages – to stay with their families; and (2) the San being the majority ethnic group at the school. This combination of factors has given the San learners space to develop a sense of pride and self-confidence. The contribution of the younger female FGD participants to the research in Mangetti Dune was particularly significant in comparison to other sites. They contributed actively and even expressed views that differed to those of the male participants.

### 16.1.4 Specific efforts targeting San learners

At the time of our field research there were several efforts underway to support San education (described in subsection 16.3.3 under the heading “External support for San education”). There were two notable projects focusing on providing mother-tongue education and inculcating respect for San culture and language in primary schools: Gqaina Primary School in Omaheke Region and the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project in Otjozondjupa Region respectively. These are described in

more detail in the relevant chapters of this report (Box 4.2 on page 66 and Box 5.3 on page 123). Here we provide a brief description of these important examples of San-friendly education.

**Gqaina Primary School (Omaheke Region):** Gqaina Primary School (Grades 1-7) is a private, government-subsidised school established in 1991. It is considered to be a model school because it has an extremely low dropout rate (less than 5%) compared to other schools in San areas, and is the only school in Omaheke that uses a San language (Ju|'hoansi) as the medium of instruction – and a high percentage of former Gqaina learners reported still being able to read and write fluently in Ju|'hoansi long after their schooling. Gqaina Primary School has managed to facilitate positive relations between the different ethnic groups at the school; bullying is not tolerated and there is close supervision of the relationship between the learners and also between the school staff and the learners. The school employs Ju|'hoansi-speaking hostel and kitchen personnel, which further contributes to a positive learning environment for the Ju|'hoan learners (see Box 4.2 on page 66 as well as Hays and Siegrühn-Mars 2005 and Ninkova 2009). However, despite the school's success, many of the San learners drop out in their first year of secondary school. FGD participants' explanations for this situation correspond with those at other sites – described in section 16.2.

**Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project (VSP) (Otjozondjupa Region):** The VSP was developed in the early 1990s by NGOs in collaboration with the then Ministry of Education and Culture, with a view to increasing the participation of Ju|'hoan children in Tsumkwe East. The project objectives were: to provide schooling in the vicinity of the children's community; to use the mother tongue as medium of instruction; and to include traditional knowledge and skills in the curriculum – all with the ultimate goal of increasing the Ju|'hoan children's self-confidence and preparing them to attend government schools from Grade 4 onwards. In 2004, with support from the Namibia Association of Norway (NAMAS), the Ministry of Education (MoE) took over responsibility for the schools through its Regional Directorate of Education in Otjozondjupa. These schools are now known simply as the "Village Schools". There are six schools in total, but not all of them operate all the time; at the time of writing there are four schools operating. The enrolment rate is high in the villages where these schools are located. Some children from other villages travel daily to school if they are close to one of these schools, or otherwise board with relatives if that is an option. Overall, however, only about 10% of Ju|'hoan children attend a Village School; the remaining 90% either attend a mainstream government school or do not attend school at all. Furthermore, for all Ju|'hoan learners (at the Village Schools and government schools), attendance declines dramatically when moving on to the upper primary school in Tsumkwe in Grade 4.

## 16.2 Barriers to San participation in formal education

This section discusses the main barriers to San children's full participation in formal education – barriers identified in all regions visited. The three most significant barriers – which were also the reasons cited for dropping out of school – were poverty, discrimination/stigma and the remoteness of many villages. However, these and other barriers discussed in this section are interrelated and must be considered together. Although children of other ethnic groups also face some of these barriers (e.g. poverty and remoteness), San alone face the full range of barriers.

### 16.2.1 Poverty

The main reasons cited by San learners and parents for school dropout relate to finance. FGD participants reported difficulties in covering the costs of school and hostel fees, school uniforms, school materials, toiletries, and mattresses and bedding. Government has long recognised this,

and has made efforts to remove financial barriers to school attendance, in particular by exempting 'children in need', including San children, from paying school fees. The policy options document described above (MBESC 2000) states the following:

"A major reason for children not attending school or for dropping out of school is poverty. Thus, as a first step, the MBEC should insist on the implementation of its directives to schools regarding payment of school fund fees and the wearing of school uniforms. Neither of these are compulsory and school authorities should use their discretion in this case." (MBESC 2000: 25-26)

The exemption of school fees was also emphasised in the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children 2006-2010 (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) 2007), which urges parties to do the following:

"Ensure that OVC who cannot afford the costs of schooling are exempted from all such costs, by (a) disseminating accessible information nationwide on exemptions from school fees, hostel fees, examination fees, contributions to school development funds and other school-related expenses to children and their caregivers; (b) monitoring and enforcing implementation of the regulations on exemptions by schools nationwide; (c) activating the Education Development Fund to reimburse schools which provide exemptions from contributions to school development funds; and (d) putting in place a plan for exempting OVC from uniforms, or for providing uniforms to OVC free or at reduced cost." (MGECW 2008 reprint: 28).

The National Agenda for Children 2012-2016 (MGECW 2012) states the following in relation to the costs of schooling:

"The Education Act provides that, *"All tuition provided for primary and special education in state schools, including all school books, educational materials and other related requisites, must be provided free of charge to learners until the seventh grade, or until the age of 16 years, whichever occurs first."* Therefore, the School Development Fund (SDF) system which has been in force since 2001 appears to be in contravention of the constitutional right to free primary education at state schools." (MGECW 2012: 19)

The National Agenda for Children lists priority strategies for attaining the desired education outcomes, the following being the first strategy listed for primary education:

"Address the private costs of education by investigating its affordability in view of the constitutional provision for free and compulsory primary education and making recommendations to Cabinet as to how government can adhere to this provision." (MGECW 2012: 20)

Therefore, as educationally marginalised and vulnerable children, San learners were (or should have been) exempted from paying school fees. However, according to FGD participants, the school fee exemption had not helped improve attendance much, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the policies had been implemented inconsistently, and many San children and parents reported that they were still expected to pay the fees at the time of our research. Parents in all regions made statements like "the principal makes us pay" or "they are requesting school fees from us" (and parents often avoided going to the schools simply to avoid such requests). The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, in reporting on his visit to Namibia in 2012, also stated that San learners described being "routinely turned away from schools for not paying development fund fees" (Anaya 2013: 16).

Secondly, even where the exemption policy was implemented, San were often hesitant to request the exemption due to their fear of being stigmatised by teachers and other learners. Ninkova, referring to

her research in Omaheke Region, described this phenomenon as the “dilemmas of special treatment” (Ninkova 2009: 76). FGD participants in our study reported that tensions arose when learners from other ethnic groups thought that the San received unwarranted preferential treatment.

Finally, financial difficulties for San learners go beyond the school fees themselves: school uniforms and other clothes are also considered necessary for school, as are toiletries and other products necessary for personal hygiene – and the difficulty of paying for toiletries was mentioned as a particular reason for dropping out of school, especially for girls. Many San learners reported that they faced bullying by other learners and teachers due to the fact that they could not afford toiletries and thus could not wash properly; learners reported being told by both school officials and other learners that they were “dirty” or “smelled bad”.

Since January 2013, primary education has been ‘free of charge’ for all children in government schools, in that parents/guardians of learners in Grades 1-7 no longer have to contribute to the School Development Fund.<sup>7</sup> If implemented in practice across the board, this could solve the problems associated with singling out the San (and OVC) for exemption from school fees – but it will not address the problem of the additional expenses for hostel fees, bedding, toiletries, uniforms and other necessary items. Furthermore, this exemption from paying school fees applies only to primary schools, and San learners in secondary schools report the same financial challenges.

The extreme poverty faced by most San also forces children to leave school in order to contribute to their meagre family incomes – a reason for school dropout cited at a number of our research sites. A recent ILO report assessing the extent to which San children are involved in child labour in Omaheke, Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa and Kunene Regions found that child labour was occurring in San communities with a prevalence described as often “high or very serious” (ILO 2012: 7). San children engaged in a range of economic activities, but mainly farmwork, domestic work, construction work and selling small items. The ILO found that some of the working children could be exposed to extreme hazards ranging from toxic substances and dangerous equipment to harsh weather conditions and sexual abuse, whereas others did not face such hazards; some dropped out of school simply to take over domestic work in their own households in order to free their parents from chores so that they could pursue piecework or paid work (ILO 2012: 62). The majority of the children who reported being engaged in productive work were still enrolled in school, although work certainly had the potential to affect their school attendance (ILO 2012: 7).

It is thus clear that poverty affects San children’s ability to attend school in numerous ways.

### 16.2.2 Discrimination

Discrimination against San learners was still common 23 years after Independence. At our research sites in all regions, we heard narratives outlining the verbal and physical abuses that San children endured in schools and hostels. This discrimination experienced by the San has been described in many publications over the last 20 years (e.g. Le Roux 1999; Suzman 2001b; Hays 2002 and 2007; and Ninkova 2009), and apparently the situation has not improved. In its *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children*, the MBESC also acknowledged discriminatory attitudes as a major factor in learners’ reluctance to attend school and in the high dropout rates (MBESC 2000: 23). More than a decade later, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Ministry of Education, “Latest News and Events: Free Primary Education from 2013”, accessed at [www.moe.gov.na/news\\_article.php?type=pressrelease&id=97&title=Free](http://www.moe.gov.na/news_article.php?type=pressrelease&id=97&title=Free).

James Anaya, reported hearing from San communities: "... almost uniformly that discrimination, teasing, and negative stereotyping of San children characterises their educational experience" (Anaya 2013: 16).

FGD participants in our study revealed that many learners misrepresented their identity in order to hide being San and thereby escape mistreatment.

It was not only the children themselves who faced prejudice; San parents were also confronted with stereotypes perpetuated by school staff and parents from other ethnic groups. The most prominent bias expressed by others is the perception that San parents do not take an interest in their children's education. This misconception was often attributed to the fact that few San parents had attended school and were therefore unable to recognise the importance of education for their children. Our findings clearly contradict this stereotype: San parents at all sites emphasised the importance of formal education for their children's wellbeing. They further stressed that their children's formal education would improve their own wellbeing, as in later years the children would be employed in the formal sector and would thus be able to take care of their parents. FGD participants discussed the importance of a good education for their children as a precondition for any development of their communities.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities recommended the following, among other things, in 2005:

"Complaints about discrimination and stereotypical utterances against San learners should be thoroughly investigated and punished. The government should criminalize discrimination in all forms but in particular based on race or ethnicity in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and Article 2 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights." (ACHPR 2005: 129-130)

The discrimination experienced by most San learners and their families is often traumatising, and has deep and long-lasting effects. It leads to low self-esteem as well as mistrust of members of other ethnic groups and school staff. The psychological and emotional impacts of the mistreatment also severely reduce learners' motivation to attend school. The end result for most San learners is that they leave the formal education system prematurely – which, in the absence of other education and training and opportunities, has serious repercussions for their future economic options.

### 16.2.3 Remote location of villages

A third major barrier to education for most San has been the long distances between the learners' home villages and their schools. Such distances have several important ramifications. Firstly, San learners must travel far to attend school, and public transport is costly and rarely available, thus the majority of learners (except those living in towns like Outjo and Gobabis) have to leave their home villages to live either in hostels or with relatives or other families during the school year. Secondly, most San children have always lived in small family groups, close to their parents and extended family, thus moving to a hostel at an early age can be terrifying for them, and reports of bullying – often extreme – are common. Furthermore, the living conditions in government school hostels are often far from adequate. It was reported in *The Namibian* newspaper in 2013 that residents of the hostel at Donkerbos Primary School in Omaheke Region had to sleep on the bare floor, with no electricity at all, and an irregular supply of water (*The Namibian*, Charles Tjatini, 11 April 2013). Parents in our FGDs in other regions reported similar hostel conditions, and an additional

common complaint was that other children steal the San learners' few belongings. Lastly, San learners faced discriminatory practices by hostel staff on a regular basis.

Many learners who had the option of living at home while attending school still had to walk long distances to school. Parents worried that this was dangerous for their children.<sup>8</sup> Long distances also meant that parents could not be sure – and could not ensure – that their children actually attended school, and cases of children skipping school were mentioned frequently in our FGDs at various research sites. Furthermore, the long distances meant that it was difficult for parents to interact with the schools; they rarely visited the schools due to the distances, and this contributed to the above-mentioned stereotypical misconception that San parents do not care about education. When there was a problem with a learner at school, it was often difficult for the teacher to get in touch with the parents, and this often led to misunderstandings, with the result that the children stayed at home.

San who lived together with non-San people (e.g. in communities in Omusati, Ohangwena and Kavango) frequently reported that their children went to live in host households of other ethnic groups. It was not always clear whether the children were expected to do domestic chores to pay their way, and some parents complained that their children were not treated well in these families.

Many children who had the option of attending lower primary school close to home then faced the need to travel further away to attend upper primary or secondary school. The disproportionately large decline in attendance numbers for San learners following the transition from lower to upper primary and then to secondary school can be attributed largely to the conditions described above.

#### 16.2.4 Cultural mismatch

The cultural mismatch between school and home can be broken down into two general categories: language, and differences in cultural and social practices.

**Language:** Despite the progressive Language Policy for Schools in Namibia (see both MEC 1991 and MBESC 2003), efforts on the ground have not led to the expected results. The policy has not been implemented evenly across the country, and most San languages have been excluded. At present there are orthographies and dictionaries for only three San languages, namely Ju|'hoansi, !Xun and Khwedam. Of these, only Ju|'hoansi is recognised and used for formal education purposes, but only in the Gqaina Primary School in Omaheke and the Village Schools in Nyae Nyae, Otjozondjupa (described above and in the relevant chapters). Thus far only Ju|'hoansi has a functional curriculum committee under the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED – a government body). The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA – see Chapter 3) has established language committees for !Xun, Khwedam, Taa and Hai|om, which have developed some basic literary resources for these San languages, but a lack of financial resources has hindered publication of these. Furthermore, these language groups have not taken the first step of applying to the MoE for official recognition of their languages as languages of instruction, this being a prerequisite for their official use in schools (Davids 2011: 129). Funding is a major obstacle for these efforts: mother-tongue language development is mainly donor-driven and thus dependent to a very large extent on outside funding (Davids 2010).

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<sup>8</sup> For example, discussion participants Uitkoms Resettlement Farm cited a case of a schoolgirl being raped on her way to school, and parents in some rural places worried about wild animals possibly attacking their children.

Another significant obstacle to achieving mother-tongue education in San languages is a lack of qualified teachers able to teach in San languages and to use the materials developed. Even the Nyae Nyae Village Schools and Gqaina Primary School, both of which incorporated Ju|'hoansi education (see below), had to reduce the number of classes taught in Ju|'hoansi as there were not enough teachers available for this task. The Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project trained 12 teachers from the surrounding communities in the 1990s, but by 2011, none of these teachers were involved in the project any longer (Davids 2011: 130; Hays 2002). With support from NAMAS, other Ju|'hoansi-speaking teachers are currently being trained, and some have already received certification. Most of these teachers are San, but a few of the San teachers are not Ju|'hoansi (see Box 5.3 on the Village Schools, page 123).

The lack of teachers and the slow progress in the development of mother-tongue materials mean that the vast majority of San learners have to learn in a 'foreign' language which many of them only start to encounter when entering school.

**Cultural and social practices:** The traditional socialisation and educational practices of the San differ considerably from the Western models applied in formal education systems. A number of authors have discussed child-rearing and socialisation among San groups (e.g. Biesele 1992 and 1993; Draper 1976; Konner 1976; Katz et al. 1997; and Guenther 1999). Following is a summary of the ways in which these practices can conflict with formal schooling (from Hays 2007: 227-248). The list is not exhaustive, but the few examples provided suffice to explain the difficulties that San children face in schools:

- San cultures generally do not tolerate aggressive behaviour and competitiveness, whereas the mainstream schooling system promotes competition, which requires self-promotion, and the latter is strongly discouraged in most San cultures.
- In many San cultures, parents place little pressure on their children to work, and do not fully involve their children in performing daily chores until the children reach adolescence, whereas compulsory schooling demands children's full participation at all times.
- Most San cultures strongly emphasise personal autonomy and free will, whereas learners in formal schools have little freedom; there is a rigid schedule every day which leaves little room for individual choices (also as regards subjects of study).
- San children often accompany their parents and learn by observing, thereby gaining detailed and integrated knowledge about, for example, a large variety of plants and animal species, but this way of teaching and learning strongly contrasts with the formal schooling methods which are based on rote memorisation and hierarchical classification.
- Learning practices of the San generally emphasise the process rather than the result, with failure viewed as a normal part of the learning process (and sometimes as an acceptable and normal outcome), whereas in formal education, learners who do not meet the requirements according to schedule are viewed as 'failures'.
- San learning techniques are based on internal rather than external motivation, whereas formal schooling techniques generally rely on external forms of reward and punishment.

It has to be emphasised that the San on the whole have faced dramatic changes in their livelihood contexts, and these changes have resulted in transformations of their socialisation and educational practices (as described in several sections of this report). However, their deeply-rooted cultural beliefs are changing more slowly, and this slower transformation is "... creating a widening gap between what is needed to participate in mainstream society and its institutions, and the cultural belief systems and values" (Hays 2007: 248).

## 16.2.5 Inappropriate curricula

Namibian school curricula do not reflect the history and the social realities of San communities, which makes it difficult for San learners to relate the content of their learning to their own lives. Furthermore, their fellow learners do not learn about the specific history or living circumstances of San communities, or about their rich culture, in the course of their schooling.

This issue was discussed in detail during the San Study workshop with community representatives. Participants from Nyae Nyae Conservancy reported that on one occasion the San elders visited their schools to tell the learners about their past and their specific skills. Apparently the San learners appreciated this input; they had reported that the narratives had greatly motivated them, and had sensitised the other learners and the teachers. The workshop participants stressed the importance of a positive representation of San culture and history – one focusing not only on their history as hunter-gatherers, but also on other aspects of their rich culture. This example from Nyae Nyae is a positive example that could be followed elsewhere.

## 16.2.6 Lack of role models

In all regions it was repeatedly reported that the lack of role models further reduced the motivation of San learners. At each site, FGD participants indicated that they knew of hardly anyone in their own community who could serve as a role model. Although some San learners have succeeded in reaching Grade 12, in reality they are no more likely to find a job than those who dropped out of school early. In fact, at least one study has shown a negative correlation between education and employment (in Tsumkwe; Lee 2013).

The formal school curricula do not encourage visionary and innovative thinking about alternative career development paths for the San. Asked what professions they envisioned for themselves, most of the younger FGD participants restricted their responses to very conventional occupations, with teacher, police officer, nurse and lawyer cited most often. Many of the few San who made it through the education system had left their communities to undertake tertiary education or further training in Windhoek (see Box 16.1 on San in Windhoek further on), and because they were far away and returned to their home villages/towns only occasionally, they could not serve as role models.

Participants in the workshop for community representatives complained that the “Back to School and Stay at School” campaign run by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) used non-San promoters; they felt that it would have been more appropriate to use San people who had successfully completed their schooling so as to provide more realistic and inspiring models for San youth.

## 16.2.7 Teenage pregnancies

In all regions, teenage pregnancies and early marriages were cited as reasons for the high rates of early dropout among girls. At certain sites it was also reported that young San girls sometimes entered into sexual relationships with elderly men in exchange for money, which also led to their dropping out of school. It was also reported that San girls sometimes experienced domestic violence and sexual abuse (both linked to alcohol consumption). Lastly, it was reported that teenage mothers usually did not return to school after giving birth.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This problem is not unique to the San. One main goal of the *Education Sector Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy* (MoE 2012b) is to increase the number of learner-parents who complete their education.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recorded complaints from San girls about sexual abuse by their teachers. He also reported that teenage San mothers who wanted to return to school had been turned away (Anaya 2013: 17). By no means are these experiences exclusive to San girls, but due to their extremely weak position in the social hierarchy at schools (as described throughout this report), San girls are especially vulnerable to such abuses.

## 16.3 Other educational issues

Most of the funding allocated to improving San education – through both governmental and non-governmental approaches – is aimed at increasing participation from Grade 1 through Grade 12, and especially in the primary education phase (Grades 1-7). However, there is growing support for efforts to address both younger and older learners, including: early childhood education; tertiary education or further training for those who complete secondary school (or who reach a level that allows for entry into further programmes); and adult education for those who have little or no formal education. Some efforts in these areas are outlined in the following subsections.

### 16.3.1 Early Childhood Development

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme is run under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW), which is responsible for children aged 0-4, and the Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for pre-primary education (ages 5-6). This means that the responsibility for ECD is split between two ministries. The government provides pre-schools in some areas, but the distribution of pre-schools remains uneven across the country. Despite efforts to prioritise rural and poor communities, hardly any pre-schools have been established in the vicinity of San communities, even though experiences have shown that San learners who participate in pre-primary education are more comfortable with the formal learning environment thereafter. Pre-schooling for the majority (if not all) San children would enhance their chances of success in primary school, and thus would reduce the high rates of dropout from school (Haraseb 2011: 136).

ECD is one component of WIMSA's education programme. This component is supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation (based in The Hague). Through its ECD programme, WIMSA has been involved in developing and opening ECD centres (for ages 0-4) and pre-schools (for ages 5-6) for San communities in five regions, i.e. Omaheke, Kunene, Oshikoto, Caprivi and Otjozondjupa. The initiative for this ECD programme flowed from WIMSA's establishment of community youth groups, members of which decided to focus on ECD activities. WIMSA offers these group members opportunities for training in ECD provided by the National Early Childhood Development-NGO Association (NECD-NGO Association). The main goal of WIMSA's ECD programme is to provide access to pre-school education that "... uses their mother tongue as a language of instruction, in learning centres managed by San communities, and using trained San teachers – and, in the process, to develop stronger cultural identity and pride" (Haraseb 2011: 139). In addition, this programme helps learners to proceed to the next phase of their education by, for example, programme staff assisting with their enrolment in primary schools. WIMSA's programme also links ECD with community development, in that the ECD centres and pre-schools are built by community members with government support (in the form of building materials or food for work), and teaching staff are recruited from the community (Haraseb 2011: 140).

The report on the final assessment of WIMSA's ECD programme (WIMSA 2010) concludes that the learners who had attended a WIMSA ECD centre or pre-school seemed to enrol in higher numbers in primary school, and managed relatively better than others in the primary school environment.

However, the report also identifies weaknesses in the programme. For example: the use of mother tongue was not always applied consistently; there were variations across facilities and in relation to equipment (e.g. some of these facilities were not able to provide basic amenities such as toilets and/or basins for handwashing); weak supervision and support of staff; and the lack of a system for monitoring the transition from pre-primary to primary school (WIMSA 2010: 17-18).

UNESCO Namibia is involved in supporting ECD policies and developments through its Education of Children in Need (2002-2013) project. The overall objective of this project is to contribute to the national goals of social justice and equity by advocating for, and promoting, every child's right to a sound foundation for life through contextually appropriate and inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and by placing ECD in the forefront of policy formulation and effective programme implementation. The project's integrated approach entails viewing education in a holistic way, and integrating community participation, hygiene, health, nutrition, culture, citizenship and other correlated issues that affect children's development. Since 2002 the project has established five ECD centres in Ohangwena Region and three in West Caprivi. A training programme for ECD teachers provides ongoing training; a feeding scheme supports learners in the ECD centres as well as in primary schools; and basic toiletries, school uniforms and teaching materials are supplied through the project.

### 16.3.2 Tertiary education

Very few San learners have qualified for tertiary education, even though various institutions have provided support over the years for San learners' educational progress beyond secondary school. The OPM funds scholarships for San studying at either the University of Namibia (UNAM) or the Polytechnic of Namibia (see the subsection on external support for San education further on, and Box 16.1 on the next page), and WIMSA provides support for San learners who have qualified for further education. In addition, support is available for San youth who may not have completed secondary school but would like to receive practical training. For example, the Namibian Community Skills Development Foundation (COSDEF) is supporting and supervising community skills development centres (COSDECs) which provide competency-based skills training, some of which is directed at San youth specifically (see paragraph on COSDEF further on). UNESCO supported a leadership and skills training programme for underprivileged groups and a youth project in Ohangwena (2006-2012) which in turn sought to support local initiatives to generate sustainable livelihoods in non-agricultural activities, provide vocational skills development, and undertake training in leadership and organisational development as well as business and finance management.



Above: A San man who completed his tertiary education through WIMSA's Tertiary Student Support Programme for San, and went on to full-time formal employment in Windhoek.

See Box 16.1 on the next page for further detail on San living in Windhoek (i.e. students and graduates now working in the capital).

## Box 16.1: The San in Windhoek

By Richard Kiaka

Throughout our research, and during the feedback sessions conducted for the San Study, it emerged that there were a number of San people living in Windhoek, many of whom were here for further studies. As most tertiary education and training opportunities are found in the capital, those who manage to complete their formal schooling tend to end up here. Others whom we interviewed in Windhoek occupied a formal position (in a government office or an NGO) that required a certain level of formal education. Most of the San living in Windhoek fall into one of these two categories (or they have a family member who does). The San in Windhoek did not come from a particular community; they hailed from various San communities, and represented most of the San language families. As a group, they had higher levels of education than their fellow San at the regional research sites, higher income levels and generally a greater awareness of their identity as 'San'.

The research team conducted interviews with some of these Windhoek-based San individuals, with an emphasis on their educational career and experience.<sup>a</sup> The aims were: to understand how they compared their existence in the city to living in their communities; to identify factors contributing to the success of San individuals in the formal education system; and to compare their experiences to those recounted at our research sites in the other regions.

The San interviewees in Windhoek considered their living conditions in this city to be better than in their home communities. This was at least partly due to the fact that they were either working and receiving a salary, or studying and receiving a stipend – in both cases benefiting from a regular income. At the same time, this income was necessary for them to be able to live in the city, and if there were problems and the income ceased or became irregular, it was far more difficult for them to get by than it was in their home communities. Some of the interviewees were residing with immediate family members in Windhoek, and others were alone, but all of them lacked the extensive social support networks which would have supported them in difficult circumstances back home. So, while appreciating the advantages of living in Windhoek, some interviewees also expressed a preference for being closer to their families and support networks. It was clear that an essential precondition for living in Windhoek was a dependable source of money.

The interviewees regarded formal education as the key to their current positions – all had attained a level of education that enabled them to move on to tertiary training or qualified them for government or administrative jobs. In the course of the interviews it became clear that those who had continued beyond primary school (i.e. Grade 7) had been able to do so because they received outside support. The most important kind of support was financial – all of the interviewees had received financial support for secondary and/or tertiary education.

The financial support that the interviewees received came from the Student Support Programme of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), or scholarship programmes offered by the Roads Authority (a Namibian parastatal), or the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) or the Forum for African Women Educationalists Namibia (FAWENA). The OPM Student Support Programme sponsors the highest number of San studying in Windhoek because it has a higher budget for this purpose than other organisations offering stipends for San. However, the interviewees who benefited from this OPM programme reported encountering some difficulties with this support. In particular, monthly stipends and tuition fees were often paid late – a situation which understandably caused complications for the students. Furthermore, communication about these problems and other concerns was an issue. They had also found it difficult to navigate the funding application process, and revealed that only a limited number of San are able to access information on funding opportunities for further education, primarily due to the remoteness of their home communities.

Such issues pose serious challenges for current and potential San students, and indicate a need for better coordination within and between the relevant institutions.

In addition to financial support, a number of the interviewees emphasised that they had received encouragement and moral support from key individuals – usually family members, teachers and other school staff – to do well in school. This kind of support included building self-confidence, following up on school performance, and in general motivating them to aspire to doing well. Some indicated that this kind of support could take the form of parents ‘forcing’ their children to go to school – something that San parents are frequently said *not* to do (as noted earlier in this chapter). It is not always clear what is meant by ‘force’ in this context, but for some it seemed to mean simply providing a strong incentive to continue going to school – which ultimately enabled them to obtain a Grade 10 or Grade 12 certificate. The narratives of the San in Windhoek showed that this kind of support and encouragement plays an important role in determining how long San learners continue with their schooling.

Most of the San interviewed in Windhoek saw themselves as achievers in education and/or their career, and as people who could serve as examples and role models for other San youth who desired take the same route of tertiary education/training in Windhoek. Most of them said that they would be willing to participate in the “Back to School and Stay at School” campaign run by the OPM, and in other existing (or planned) initiatives aimed at motivating and supporting San students to continue with their formal education.<sup>b</sup>

The interviews with the San in Windhoek made clear that the two major factors that helped them to complete their formal education were financial support and an encouraging learning environment – two factors that were also identified in our research discussions and interviews at all sites in the other regions. Because financial support is crucial for San who want to access secondary and tertiary education, a comprehensive strategy is needed for effectively disseminating information to San who may be eligible for funding from existing sources (OPM, WIMSA, FAWENA etc.), and for supporting applicants with the funding application process – with special efforts directed to those in remote communities. In addition, timely payment of stipends is critical to preclude placing students in a difficult financial situation.

It is important that San have the same opportunities for education and employment as other ethnic groups, thus the efforts of the OPM and support organisations to assist San financially and otherwise to attain higher education levels and to access employment are very necessary. Without such support, it would be extremely difficult for any San to access such opportunities.

It is also important to recognise that the San interviewed in Windhoek were in this city because of jobs or education, thus they had opted to live in Windhoek to take advantage of these opportunities. However, not all San – indeed very few – express a desire to live in Windhoek or other urban areas. Some San individuals come to the city but then choose to return to their home communities where they have support networks in place. Therefore it is important that San also have such opportunities closer to home. This desire was also expressed by some interviewees in Windhoek, who envisaged returning to their communities after completing their studies, in the hope that they could serve as role models for younger members of their communities.

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<sup>a</sup> Potential interviewees were identified through a snowball system. Semi-structured interviews and group discussions were conducted with the San interviewees from February to April 2013. We interviewed nine people who were employed by different government agencies and NGOs, and 17 students. In total there were 10 female and 20 male interviewees. Most of the students hailed from the Khwe and Hai||om communities in Caprivi and Kunene Regions, and two were Ju|’hoan students from Gobabis (Omaheke) and Mangetti Dune (Tsumkwe West, Otjozondjupa). All of the students interviewed were studying with the support of the OPM Student Support Programme.

<sup>b</sup> See section 16.2.6 on the lack of role models.

### Box 16.2: A Khwe case study

The following case study describes the education and career trajectory of a Khwe man who successfully advanced through the formal education system and was then offered a job in government. He is one of the very few San people in such a position. Although his experience can hardly be said to be representative, and such opportunities seem far removed from the day-to-day realities of San villages and informal settlements in Namibia, participants in our discussions at all research sites expressed a desire to have more people from their communities attaining such positions.<sup>a</sup> Thus it is important to recognise that this man's career trajectory, though rare, does represent the aspirations of a number of San today.

The research team interviewed a 29-year-old Khwe man living in Windhoek, whom we will call Petrus. He is currently an Assistant Human Resource Officer in the Office of the President.

Petrus began his education at Ndoro Memorial Primary School in Caprivi Region, where he completed Grade 7. He went on to Caprivi Senior Secondary School in Katima Mulilo, where he completed Grade 12. An exemption from paying school fees made it possible for him to finish both primary and secondary education, but Petrus also stressed the importance of the support that he had received from his parents – in particular he said that his father paid close attention to his performance in school and motivated him to continue with his studies.

With assistance from WIMSA, Petrus obtained a government loan from the Ministry of Education to finance his BA degree in Public Administration at the University of Namibia in Windhoek. He received further support from WIMSA to cover his living expenses in the first year of his studies, and in subsequent years he received full support through the University of Botswana/University of Tromsø Collaborative Programme for San Research and Capacity Building, which included support for San tertiary students as a major focus. Petrus finished his bachelor's degree in 2007, and in 2009 he worked part time for WIMSA helping students from indigenous communities to get education loans or school fees exemptions from the government. In 2010, WIMSA employed him on a full-time basis as Coordinator for the Namibian San Council. While working for WIMSA he continued to apply for government jobs, and in 2011 his job hunt reaped success in the form of a position as a clerk in the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement. Towards the end of 2011, Petrus accepted the offer of the position that he now occupies in the Office of the President. He hopes to move forward in his career, and is currently pursuing an MA in Public Administration at the University of Namibia.

<sup>a</sup> As mentioned earlier, not all San desired such positions for themselves – but almost all of them see the value of having community members who “succeed” in national institutions.

### 16.3.3 Adult education

Several organisations (notably NAMAS, the Kalahari Peoples Fund and COSDEF) have initiated adult education programmes in order to respond to the very low levels of basic literacy and numeracy among San adults. FGD participants in Nyae Nyae Conservancy (Tsumkwe East, Otjozondjupa Region) reported that adult literacy classes there were supported by NAMAS, and they indicated that they greatly appreciated these classes. However, the adult literacy class teachers reported that it was difficult to maintain classes, because those whom they were attempting to teach tended to drop out after a short time, usually due to their having to engage in other activities (mainly chores such as getting food). WIMSA is also engaged in promoting adult education classes, but here too, efforts are often hampered by people dropping out of classes before they have learned to read and write.

## 16.4 Factors contributing to a successful formal education

San interviewees and FGD participants in Windhoek (see Box 16.1) cited several factors which had contributed to their success in the mainstream schooling system, and would therefore, in their opinion, contribute to other San succeeding in this system. First of all, moral support – from family members, school staff or peer groups – had been fundamental in motivating them to progress to Grade 12. Secondly, access to information on scholarships covering school expenses and all related costs enabled them to attend school. Our research brought to light that information dissemination on funding possibilities was erratic and did not reach all communities; it appears that information was transferred mainly through family or community members who knew of the existing options. Thirdly, a learner's own initiative and self-confidence, as well as willingness to leave his/her comfort zone (in this case the home environment), are important personal attributes that contribute to the successful pursuit of tertiary education and formal employment.

## 16.5 External support for San education

**Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA):** WIMSA's education programme focuses on coordinating different stakeholders to find regional solutions to issues impacting on San education. The activities include: monitoring the status of San education in southern Africa; documenting innovative approaches to San education; coordinating San language development; and providing platforms for regional exchange among policymakers. One focal area is mother-tongue development, with a special emphasis on ECD and the lower primary phase of education (Grades 1-3). WIMSA has developed mother-tongue teaching materials in San languages for mathematics and environmental sciences, as well as story books for pre-primary learners (ages 5-6). WIMSA also channels support to San attending tertiary education institutions.

**Namibia Association of Norway (NAMAS):** NAMAS has been active in Namibia since 1980. In 2002, after experiencing success with the Ondao Mobile Schools Project targeting the Ovahimba and Ovazemba communities in Kunene Region, NAMAS decided to look into the situation of education for the San. A report produced by the then Norwegian Ambassador to Namibia, Bernt Lund, titled *Mainstreaming Through Affirmative Action* (2002), outlines the need for San education in the country. Following a consultative conference with government in 2003 to determine how best to implement the recommendations of Lund's report, NAMAS agreed to establish a community learning and development centre (CLDC) in Tsumkwe (Otjozondjupa Region), and to assist the newly-established Regional Directorate of Education in Otjozondjupa with administering the Nyae Nyae Village Schools (which the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNFN) transferred to the government in 2004). Over the past decade, NAMAS has played an important role in supporting San teachers and educational development in Tsumkwe East and West.

**Forum for African Women Educationalists in Namibia (FAWENA):** The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is a pan-African NGO that operates in over 34 African countries. The Namibian national chapter (FAWENA) opened its office in 1999 with the support of the MoE to help address the educational challenges faced by girls in this country. FAWENA's goal is to increase access, improve retention, and enhance the quality of education for girls and women in Namibia. Since 2004, part of the FAWENA support programme has specifically targeted San community members through various measures. Its scholarship programme supports San female *and* male learners by providing financial means to cover costs associated with education (costs of teaching materials, school uniforms, toiletries etc.). Between 2004 and 2012 it was also able to support 950

San learners. FAWENA has also established a mentoring programme to help learners to overcome problems that can affect their academic career, and the Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) programme aims to increase interest and participation in these subjects and assist girls to excel in SMT subjects at all levels. Lastly, FAWENA mobilises and sensitises San communities on the importance of education for San girls and boys.

**United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO):** UNESCO's office in Windhoek has been working with San communities since 2002, when, in collaboration with the regional authorities and communities, it established a number of ECD centres in Ohangwena and Caprivi Regions. The main objectives of these centres were to provide access to quality pre-primary education for San and other vulnerable children, and to improve access to, and retention in, primary schools. UNESCO Namibia also supports initiatives targeting San youth, which focus on generating sustainable livelihoods, and providing leadership and skills training. In 2012, UNESCO initiated and organised a sub-regional conference titled "Indigenous Education in a Changing World", in collaboration with WIMSA and UNAM, and in consultation with the MoE. This conference, held in Windhoek on 19-21 June 2012, built on previous meetings and coordinating efforts, including the first regional San Education Conference in 2001 and the Southern African San Education Forum (SASEF) Namibia Conference in Windhoek in 2009. The purpose of the conference in 2012 was to determine what efforts had been made to improve formal education for San communities, and to identify alternative learning options that could help them to meet their educational aspirations.

**Community Skills Development Foundation (COSDEF):** COSDEF has set up community skills development centres (COSDECs) in Namibia, which are administered by the MoE's Department of Vocational Training. These centres target unemployed youth who do not have the educational qualifications needed for tertiary education, but want to develop their existing vocational skills or new ones. The centres prepare them to start their own businesses, find jobs or move on to higher levels of vocational training. Programmes are tailored to the local environment following a needs assessment, and are community-based and community-driven. The COSDEC in Gobabis runs two programmes targeting San youth specifically: a bricklaying and plastering course focusing on San girls;<sup>10</sup> and a carpentry course focusing on San boys. Participants are provided with accommodation and food for the duration of the training period. These San-focused programmes are sponsored by UNESCO, and funding is channelled through the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, which also supports the programme. During our field research we interviewed participants in the bricklaying and plastering programme, and they expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the training. In particular they expressed appreciation that this programme was for San trainees only, as they felt much more comfortable in a San-only learning environment.

**Office of the Prime Minister (OPM):** Since 2007 the OPM's San Development Programme (SDP) has been implementing a Student Support Programme, which has a Student Financial Assistance Fund to sponsor learners through the various stages of education from primary through tertiary. The fund has registered progress in respect of the number of learners sponsored over time: 66 in 2008; 69 in 2009; 76 in 2010; and 108 in 2011. It is possible that the growing interest in the Student Support Programme is linked to the "Back to School and Stay at School" Campaign run by the SDP. The beneficiaries in primary and secondary schools have been assisted by way of payments to the School Development Fund, hostel fees, toiletries, transport and a monthly allowance. Those at tertiary level are supported by way of payments that cover tuition fees, prescribed books, accommodation (especially for those studying outside their home areas), transport fares and a monthly allowance.<sup>11</sup> The programme has its constraints, however, which are discussed in Box 16.1 in this chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Some of the trainees were boys, but most were girls – and all were San.

<sup>11</sup> However, the beneficiaries interviewed said that they did not receive money to buy the necessary books.

## 16.6 Conclusions

The generally low level of education of the San impacts severely on their economic situation. They cannot compete in the formal job market and are therefore highly dependent on menial work – thus a high level of vulnerability is increased by a low level of education. Difficulties in accessing information, dealing with official paperwork, and developing skills/capacities and the confidence to secure other rights persist. This leads to a vicious cycle that few San are able to escape. Improving both access to education and the quality of education is of key importance in discussing improving the situation of the San, not only in economic terms but equally in terms of empowerment.

Based on our study findings, there are three general areas where substantial improvement is needed in order to increase educational options for San communities. The three main recommendations, which are elaborated below, are as follows:

- 1) Improve the implementation of existing policies.
- 2) Create a welcoming learning environment for San in government schools.
- 3) Develop and strengthen alternative approaches to education.

### 16.6.1 Policies

Namibia has developed comprehensive and far-reaching policies pertaining to indigenous peoples' education. As noted throughout this chapter, however, the implementation of these policies is seriously deficient – as evidenced by the alarmingly low numbers of San children enrolled in formal education. An integrated policy is needed for coordinating the existing and future initiatives. The evaluation of past efforts, and the development of best-practice models, will help to improve the formulation and planning of future projects, and the involvement of the applicable communities must be an essential part of all future planning. Equally important is the development of thorough implementation strategies to preclude the inconsistent application that is currently occurring.

Efforts should be based on the existing document titled *Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children* (MBESC 2000), which is based on significant research and understanding of the problems in question. This document should also provide a basis for a new policy approach. The Intersectoral Task Force on Educationally Marginalised Children should be revived and adapted to the current situation in order to coordinate future efforts. Ideally the OPM's SDP should lead this body, but the MoE or NIED might also be well positioned to lead (or jointly lead) it. As different NGOs already spearhead an array of educational projects, it is necessary to establish a platform for government and civil society to come together to coordinate their activities.

### 16.6.2 Learning environment

The existing mainstream education system is not responsive to the culture, language and needs of the different San communities in Namibia. As a result, it usually undermines rather than enhances community development. The system has failed to create a welcoming learning environment in which local diversities are recognised and communities can initiate and control their education efforts. Furthermore, given the high number of San learners in hostels, attention must be paid to improving the hostel environment so as to make this more culturally compatible and friendly for San learners. Teachers need to be sensitised about the living conditions and cultural backgrounds of their San learners. Lastly, it is necessary to identify ways to empower San parents and integrate them into the school environment.

### 16.6.3 Alternative approaches

The last few decades have seen the development of a wide range of education projects targeting San, most of which have focused almost entirely on increasing the number of San in the formal education system, with little attention paid to the quality, relevance or appropriateness of this system for San.

A major finding of our study is that even if San learners make it through the formal education system, they still face enormous difficulties in obtaining formal employment. These will certainly persist in the coming years in view of the fact that the national economy is struggling with an unemployment rate of 27% (Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) 2013: viii). There is a clear need to strengthen existing approaches that build on the skills which San learners already possess, and to develop alternative new approaches to match the opportunities and aspirations of San individuals and communities.

This report has described a few alternative approaches to education – i.e. TEKOA, Nyae Nyae Village Schools, Gqaina Primary School and COSDECs<sup>12</sup> – and their achievements and challenges. These are potential models for similar projects elsewhere. However, some critical aspects have to be considered when developing new projects. First and most importantly, communities must be consulted and included in the project planning, and should drive the process. Any project must be based on a deep understanding of the local situation; it must be relevant to local livelihood options and provide access to skills that the community itself identifies as important. Moreover, it should ideally be built on local culture, knowledge and skills, and the local language should be used throughout the process, even when providing access to a language of wider communication (Hays 2012).

## 16.7 Recommendations

The recommendations are grouped according to the three categories detailed above – recognising that a clear distinction is not always possible due to linkages and overlap.

### 16.7.1 Policy level

- **Integrated policy on indigenous education:** Such a policy should be developed, with an assigned budget and timeline, to coordinate existing and future initiatives. Past endeavours should be evaluated as a basis for this integrated policy – in particular the policy document titled *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children*.
- **Regional specifics:** While a national policy is necessary, each region should also strategise more effectively to address region-specific dynamics, and to ensure that the national policies are fully implemented.
- **Task force:** Such a body should be in place to coordinate future efforts within the framework of an integrated policy. Ideally the OPM San Development Programme should lead this body, but the MoE or NIED might also be well positioned to lead (or jointly lead) it.
- **ECD:** Cooperation between the MoE and the MGECW needs strengthening to facilitate the introduction of new ECD policies. Opportunities for employment of ECD teachers should be created. A full professional career path is needed; in this regard progress has been made by way of registering the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) ECD course in the National Qualifications Framework. Negotiations with the Public Service Commission might enable the employment of San educators even before they are fully qualified.

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<sup>12</sup> The Traditional Environmental Knowledge Outreach Academy (TEKOA) (see pages 382 and 395), the Nyae Nyae Village Schools (page 123), Gqaina Primary School (page 66) and the COSDECs (described in this chapter).

- **Coordinating platform:** A platform comprised of representatives of civil society bodies and government should be established to coordinate planning for San education initiatives. The San Support Organisations Association of Namibia (SSOAN) could play a leading role in representing civil society in this endeavour.
- **Regular dialogue mechanism:** Such a mechanism should be established for government, donors and beneficiaries to agree on priorities and financial allocations to initiatives launched under the new, integrated policy framework.
- **Poverty:** This key barrier to education should be addressed at policy level. School fee exemptions (applicable only in secondary schools as from January 2013) should be implemented uniformly. Policies need to be implemented to fund other costs such as those for uniforms, mattresses, toiletries and school books.
- **Tertiary education:** There is a need to revisit and strengthen programmes supporting San integration into tertiary education, as San participation at this level remains extremely low, with no significant improvement in recent years.
- **Hunger and nutrition:** It is necessary to expand and strengthen the school feeding programme so as to provide nutritious meals throughout the year.
- **San teachers:** The MoE should exercise flexibility in recruiting and appointing San teachers, offering them job opportunities even if they do not possess all of the required qualifications.
- **Teachers in San areas:** Government should make special efforts to encourage teachers to work in San communities, by means of specific provisions for accommodation, transportation and remuneration. Such teachers should also receive special preparation vis-à-vis cultural sensitivity.
- **Information dissemination:** The dissemination of information on funding opportunities and scholarship availability should be strengthened to overcome the current ignorance of existing support initiatives for San learners at tertiary level.
- **San role models:** Such individuals should be promoted and supported. Ongoing campaigns such as the OPM's "Back to School and Stay at School" Campaign should be run by San and staffed by San. Key positions in the OPM San Development Programme should be filled by San in order to make role models more visible.
- **OPM Scholarship Programme:** In view of the accelerating costs of living in Windhoek, this programme should be revisited and adjusted in line with existing policies pertaining to part-time work and levels of support.

## 16.7.2 Welcoming learning environment

### *Language*

Mother-tongue education, which is emphasised in the various Namibian policies, needs reinforcing through the following approaches:

- Intensify efforts to have mother-tongue classes in all regions where San live, using whatever materials and personnel are available.
- Intensify efforts to produce mother-tongue teaching materials. International efforts to develop such materials for languages spoken across borders will help to reduce the production costs. The Southern Africa San Education Forum (SASEF) could assist in this regard.
- Representatives of language groups whose languages are not formally recognised as languages of education should apply for such formal recognition.
- Greatly enhance efforts to train San teachers, and have flexible entry requirements for teacher-training candidates.
- Where trained San teachers are not available, hire teaching aids who speak the language of the applicable San children, and who can translate and assist them in other ways.
- Mother-tongue education, particularly at pre-primary level, should be targeted more strongly as it has been demonstrated that the first years of education in the mother tongue are critical.

- Implement programmes with a clear bridging phase to prepare children to learn in English, so as to minimise the negative effects of changing into another medium of instruction.

### ***Distance and access to school***

- Develop a transport plan to secure regular transport to and from schools, and ensure its thorough implementation across the regions.
- Explore flexible school options for San learners. Possible models could include a version of the mobile schools for Ovahimba and Ovazemba learners in Kunene Region, to help address the problems that might arise when children in remote villages are forced to leave their families at an early age. Experiences with the mobile school and multi-grade farm school models (which have been proposed for Botswana) should be evaluated.
- Explore flexible school schedules with a view to accommodating the livelihood patterns of San families. These would vary by location and would have to be tailored to the specific living conditions of a given San community.
- Establish more schools in the vicinity of San communities. Schools with multi-grade classes could be established to accommodate small numbers of learners.

### ***Validating San culture and overcoming stereotypes***

- Take into consideration the culture of the San when planning national curricula. The inclusion of materials that explore the richness of San culture will help San children to develop more self-esteem, and will sensitise their schoolmates to the background of their fellow learners.
- Fully acknowledge in school curricula the history of the San, and dispel the notion that San did not contribute to the attainment of independence and cannot contribute to national development. The latter can be done by citing positive examples of their roles in modern Namibia.
- Implement mediation programmes that address stigma and bullying in all areas where San live. These would help to overcome the mistrust prevailing between San learners and their teachers and fellow learners – this is critical for creating a motivating learning environment.
- Specific mentoring programmes should be designed for San learners in order to provide support in coping with the numerous challenges they face, and minimise dropout rates.
- San parents/adults should be employed in the school environment (as matrons, teachers etc.) to help to create a welcoming and understanding learning environment.
- Establish control mechanisms in schools to counter ongoing discriminatory practices faced by San learners on a daily basis.
- Include and promote ‘success stories’ in government campaigns, to combat the stereotypical notion that San children cannot succeed in school.

## **16.7.3 Alternative approaches**

- Conduct an assessment of the livelihood options, the skills required and the aspirations of the San communities in each geographical area, to design appropriate alternative education models that befit the circumstances of the San. Such models should not preclude participation in the formal education system, but should provide realistic alternatives.
- Direct more effort and resources to adult education, placing emphasis on developing projects that schedule classes in a flexible manner so as to make way for the other work in which participants might already be engaged.
- Set up vocational training centres that offer training based on assessments of realistic economic opportunities in all regions. The COSDEC model is an example of a successful effort in this regard.
- Prioritise an exploration of the potential to develop *culturally appropriate community-based education* models that combine adult and child education.