

Chapter 18

Gender

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18.1 Introduction

San women today – like many other indigenous women all over the world – face multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity and class. Many lack access to education, healthcare and their ancestral land, and face disproportionately high rates of poverty. Furthermore, they are subject to gender-based violence, both from their male San counterparts and from men of other ethnic groups (see United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2010: 1).

According to the anthropological literature, traditional Namibian San societies were characterised by gender egalitarianism. Historically, the status of women in these societies was high because of their enormous contribution to supporting their families; in many cases, women were the main

providers of food (Lee 1979; Marshall 1976).¹ Although meat – acquired mainly from the men's hunts – was highly valued, the veldfood that the women gathered in large quantities provided the bulk of the calories consumed by an extended family. Hence the man/men in the household had no comparable role as real or symbolic sole provider/s (Woodburn 1982: 440). San women were far more independent than they are today, and a husband and wife usually had equal decision-making powers. Before marriage, the prospective son-in-law was required to live with his future wife's family for some time (uxirolocal residence), to prove that he was a good hunter and could work hard (e.g. collecting wood and water), and thus could support his wife and her family – in the tradition of “bride service”.² Temporary uxirolocal residence was a common feature across San communities, and post-marital residence patterns were flexible. Widlok reported that Hai||om couples were expected to move to live with the husband's relatives only around the time when the first child could walk, but there were exceptions (Widlok 1999: 143). A similar pattern was reported for the Khwe: a newly married couple resided with the wife's parents until the first or second child was born, and then could move to live with the husband's relatives (Boden 2005: 152). Still, even if the couple moved to the husband's relatives, the husband was obliged to provide services to his parents-in-law for a lifetime (Boden 2005: 153). The Ju|'hoan men in the Nyae Nyae area (today Nyae Nyae Conservancy) were supposed to stay even longer with the wife's family, as Marshall reported:

”!Kung [Ju|'hoan³] society, rigorously and without exception, requires that all men go to live with the parents of their brides and give them bride service. Should his bride's parents be dead, the man goes to whatever relative she lives with and serves them A man is responsible for the support of his parents and their dependants, and when he marries he becomes responsible as well for the support of his wife's parents and their dependants. Any or all of these relatives may choose to live with him, and if they do, he will hunt for them. If he moves from one band to another to give bride service, or for any other reasons, he takes with him those who need or want to accompany him The duration of bride service is indefinite. The people say it should be long enough for three children to be born. ... Nothing precluded the couple's visiting the husband's people during bride service. After his obligations are fulfilled, the man is considered to have the right to return to his own people, taking his wife and children and dependants. However, he is not required by social rule to return. The couple may stay on with his wife's people.” (Marshall 1976: 169-170)

This temporary uxirolocal residence pattern has never been the norm in Namibia; here, residence is usually virilocal (home of the husband), or more and more neo-local (a new location), but generally a couple lives near the husband's natal home (GR&AP 2005a: 29). The tradition of bride service is also not the norm in Namibia, whereas the payment of a “bride price” is a common tradition: “Most traditional communities undertake to pay a bride price to the women's kinship group. This payment establishes a social relationship between the groups and, in the process, gives the man and his kinship group certain rights of control over the woman.” (LeBeau et al. 2004: 37)

These differences in residence patterns undoubtedly had implications for the situation of women in these communities. Virilocal residency implies that a woman would get less support from her natal family when encountering marital disputes or domestic violence, whereas uxirolocal and flexible residency ensured that a woman would have immediate support from her natal family whenever needed, especially during the first years of motherhood.

¹ There is a considerable volume of anthropological literature on traditional gender relations in Ju|'hoan society, but a lack of literature on such relations in other San societies. Due to the fact that subsistence practices were comparable in the various San societies in pre-colonial times, there is reason to assume that the information on traditional gender relations in Ju|'hoan society is generally valid for other pre-colonial San societies (Sylvain 1999: 39).

² For Ju|'hoansi, see Marshall 1976 (p. 169) and Sylvain 2004 (p. 9); for Hai||om, see Dieckmann 2012 (p. 41) and Widlok 1999 (p. 143); and for Khwe, see Boden 2008 (p. 120).

³ For a long time, both !Xun and Ju|'hoansi were called !Kung in the anthropological literature.

The egalitarian social structure of San communities was also reflected in their informal leadership structures: in Ju|'hoan and Hai||om communities, for example, both men and women could be the leaders of specific territories. The division of labour by gender was also not absolute in San societies generally: for subsistence, men were usually the hunters and women the gatherers, but women occasionally hunted and men often gathered; and though household chores were mainly the responsibility of women, men undertook such chores whenever necessary, and no stigma was attached to men doing so (Guenther 1999: 27). As no distinction was made between the 'domestic' and 'public/political' domains, there was no categorisation or demarcation of 'women's work' that would have placed such work in a separate – and subordinated – 'domestic' space.

Importantly, and as explored in Chapter 15 on culture, San societies in the past did not have elaborate systems of private ownership, and thus, as Sylvain has pointed out, women could not be perceived as a form of property (Sylvain 1999: 39). San societies were also among the few worldwide in which domestic violence was rare or non-existent (according to Levinson's literature-based cross-cultural comparative study of family violence – Levinson 1989: 102-103, cited in Becker 2003: 9).

Recent anthropological works focusing on the San's historical marginalisation rather than their traditional way of life (e.g. Wilmsen 1989 and Gordon and Douglas 2000) have paid little attention to gender. As Felton and Becker noted:

“It appears that the focus on the marginality of San life in contemporary southern Africa and its historical roots has precluded an evaluation of the internal differentiations and stratifications of San communities along the fault lines of gender or of other social categories such as generation, relative wealth or relative levels of education.” (Felton and Becker 2001: 5)⁴

A few short-term studies commissioned in the context of development initiatives provided some information on gender issues in specific San communities (e.g. FAO 2009, *Enhancing the well-being of women and girls in Ohangwena, Oshana and Caprivi Regions through food security and livelihood improvement initiatives: Baseline Study Report*; and Feal 2011, *Gender diagnosis: Institutional strengthening and democratic governance contributing to improve life conditions [sic] of urban and rural settlements of vulnerable communities in Namibia*, commissioned by the Habitafrica Foundation), but, being site-specific studies, none of them provided a comprehensive nationwide overview of gender issues in San communities today. Likewise, Becker and Felton's report, *A Gender Perspective on the Status of the San in Southern Africa* (2001), in the series of reports on Suzman's *Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa* (2001), was informed by a literature review and visits to three sites in southern Africa, only one of which was in Namibia, i.e. Tsumkwe West (now Nꞛa Jaqna Conservancy).

18.2 The transition of San gender relations and gender values in Namibia

Gender relations in contemporary San communities present a very different picture to the gender equality recorded for traditional San societies outlined above, since political and economic factors during colonial and post-colonial times caused a profound restructuring of the gender roles of San men and women. In many aspects of their lives, San women today find themselves in positions of inequality which are a legacy of colonialism, and which position them disadvantageously compared

⁴ One exception is Sylvain's doctoral thesis and subsequent articles on the lives of Ju|'hoan women on commercial farms in Omaheke Region (Sylvain 1999).

with other, more dominant, ethnic groups – but of course the same is true of their menfolk. With regard to gender inequality, San women nowadays have much in common with other poor women in Namibia, and less in common with their forebears.

Most importantly, the role of women as household providers diminished tremendously in colonial times after the San were dispossessed of their land, which rendered them dependent on paid (wage) labour to sustain themselves. Generally it was the men, not the women, who engaged in paid labour (as was also the case in other Namibian communities, to varying degrees of dependency on such labour). The influence of colonialism differed considerably across the San communities, depending on where they lived in the country, thus we will briefly outline the differing developments later in this chapter. There is hardly any literature on the San in former Owamboland, but there is ample anthropological literature on the Ju|'hoansi (see for example Marshall 1976, Lee 1979, Suzman 1999 and Sylvain 1999), some on the Hai||om in the Etosha region (e.g. Widlok 1999, Dieckmann 2007b and Friedrich 2009) and some on the Khwe in West Caprivi (e.g. Boden 2005 and Taylor 2012).

18.2.1 Gender relations influenced by conservative Christian values

Christian values imported into Namibia in the colonial period largely reinforced gender roles that confined women to the domestic sphere and men to the productive sphere. Men were seen as the natural authorities in both the domestic and public spheres, and women were deemed to be subject to their fathers' and husbands' controlling power. Through a number of channels, San communities were influenced by Christian values vis-à-vis gender hierarchy and the division of labour. Certain San communities became the direct target of missionary activities. Others were exposed to these values through their interactions with neighbouring groups whose cultures were traditionally male-dominated (unlike the San), and who had also been influenced by missionary activities from the 19th century onwards. These Christian values were also integrated into the culture of white farmers and into the South African Defence Force (SADF) whose members interacted directly with San communities (see further on). Last but not least, the 'new Christian churches' (e.g. the Pentecostal churches active in Namibia today) have many adherents within certain San communities (e.g. Hai||om and Ju|'hoan communities), and thus have been able to exert a strong influence in those communities in recent decades.

The direct influence of **missionary activities** on San was felt most intensively and enduringly in former Owamboland, where the Hai||om and !Xun in the western part of what is now Ohangwena Region were directly targeted by evangelical Lutheran missionaries over a period of at least 20 years.⁵ Once established in the north of the country in 1950, the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC – renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) in 1984) began to focus on the San, in cooperation with the Finnish Missionary Society. The missionaries founded a mission post in Okongo, and established San resettlement projects in Onamatadiva, Eendobe and Ekoka, in which the !Xun and Hai||om in the surrounding areas were invited to settle (Berger and Zimprich 2002). In addition to promoting their evangelism, the Finnish missionaries provided the San with basic healthcare, some degree of education, fees for labour, and food rations. They also attempted to promote agricultural production among the San. No specific information is available about the division of labour enforced by the missionaries, but almost certainly they promoted the patriarchal values described above, which were standard at the time.⁶

⁵ At times the missionaries targeted other San groups, but – to our knowledge – only for limited periods.

⁶ Missionary work was interrupted when the war for independence intensified and the SADF established a garrison at Okongo. ELCIN renewed its activities in 1993, focusing mainly on agriculture. In 1996, the Ministry of Lands, Rehabilitation and Resettlement took over ELCIN's post-resettlement support efforts.

After Independence, and especially over the last 15-20 years, **new Christian churches** – notably Pentecostal churches – rose to prominence in Namibia. They are particularly active and successful in towns with high concentrations of poor people, including San, and they recruit numerous disciples from these San communities. Most of these churches propagate a strict gender hierarchy, demanding the subordination of women to men through references to the teachings of the Bible. Statements from pastors and ‘born-again’ Christians⁷ collected by Gierse-Arsten from members of a Pentecostal church in Outjo clearly indicate that the church’s ideology promotes the husband as the head of the household, who makes the decisions in a marriage and deals with the outside world, and the wife as the partner who follows his lead (Gierse-Arsten 2004: 43). The principles preached by Pentecostal churches and their influence over their members have proven to be more significant than the principles and influence of the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches. The work of Gierse-Arsten (2004) illustrates the profound effect that joining a Pentecostal church has in terms of changing an individual’s belief system, behaviours and everyday life.

Apart from the strict gender hierarchy, it is important to also consider the following key aspects of the ideology of these Pentecostal churches: they strongly promote abstinence from alcohol and extramarital sex, and they strongly reject violence. As Maxwell points out apropos Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, “For those living on the margins of poverty Pentecostalism’s emphasis on renewing the family and protecting it from alcohol, drugs and sexual promiscuity at least stops them from slipping over the edge.” (Maxwell 1998: 369) The churches thus form family-like institutions backed by strong social cohesion, and have mechanisms in place to sanction breaches of these rules (Gierse-Arsten 2004: 27-31).⁸ So, although female members of these churches tend to be assigned a subordinated role in their households, there is likely to be a much lower level of gender-based (and alcohol-fuelled) violence with ‘born again’ couples than is the case in non-Pentecostal households.

18.2.2 Gender relations influenced by work on farms

In the past, many Ju|’hoansi, !Xoon, Naro, Hai||om and !Xun lived in areas that were allocated to white farmers for settlement during the German and South African colonial periods – today, these are the commercial farming areas of Namibia – and many of the men in these San communities were forced to become commercial farmworkers. As life on the white-owned farms was organised according to the farmer’s gender ideologies and was thus separated into male and female zones, men worked in the productive world of paid labour while women were relegated to the domestic sphere. At times, San women were taken on as domestic workers in a farmer’s household, but were usually paid very little, or were not paid any wages at all. Farmers often regarded the San women as mere appurtenances of their male kin, and San women were often not even allowed to set foot on the white-owned farms unless their husbands or fathers happened to be working there. Eventually this situation caused very clear gender inequalities among the San themselves (Sylvain 2004: 10).

Living on commercial farms also changed San marriage patterns: if a San man wished to retain his job on the farm, he could not perform bride service or move to be near his wife’s family. Women thus had to move to the farms where their husbands worked – which were usually some distance away from their own families – and hence were dependent on their husbands’ income and rations earned

⁷ The term ‘born again’ is commonly used to refer to a member of one of the new Christian churches.

⁸ When ‘born-again’ break the rules of a Pentecostal church, they have to confess their sins not only in front of the pastor (as is the case in the traditional Catholic Church), but also in front of the whole congregation. These ‘sinners’ generally view this confession as a cathartic experience: “... if I have done something wrong and I go to my congregation, I feel very bad, because they are very seriously [sic]. You must be honest to yourself. You have to talk So you have to press yourself to change. You have to get a consciousness.” (Key informant for Gierse-Arsten 2004: 28)

from farmwork. In the event that a San woman wished to split from her husband or to divorce, it was difficult for her to move back in with her own family since this depended on the goodwill of the farmer who owned the farm where her parents lived and her father worked. Farmers generally discouraged too many dependants from staying with their workers on the farms, especially after the introduction of labour legislation in the 1990s (Sylvain 2004: 10). Ju|'hoan women living with their husbands on farms told Sylvain that they were “under” their husbands and that the husbands were their bosses.

18.2.3 Gender relations influenced by neighbouring ethnic groups

Over recent centuries, many San groups have come to live scattered among neighbouring ethnic groups: the Hai||om and !Xun lived among Owambo groups in former Owamboland; the !Xun lived among the Kavango people in the former Okavango Region; Ju|'hoansi lived among the Herero in former Hereroland; !Xoon lived among the Herero and Tswana in the Aminuis and Corridor areas in what is now Omaheke Region; and Khwe in the Caprivi were in contact with Mbukushu and other Caprivian groups. There is very little collated information available on the lives of the San communities living in the homelands created for other ethnic groups in the 1960s following the recommendations of the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into South West African Affairs* (known as the “Odendaal Plan”) (South Africa 1964). The following examples reflect the scattered nature of the information:

- In the 1920s, !Xoon worked for the Tswana in their fields, herding livestock and doing domestic work; they also hunted in the service of the Tswana. The relationship to the Tswana was portrayed as slave-like and humiliating (Boden 2011a: 18).
- Towards the end of the 19th century, San and Owambo coexisted relatively peaceably for some time (Suzman 2001b: 34). In the 1950s, the !Xun around Ekoka (in what is now Ohangwena Region) worked for Owambo people in different ways, whereas the Hai||om in the same area managed to remain separate from the Owambo, and still generally depended on hunting and gathering to sustain themselves rather than labouring for others (Takada 2007: 78).
- The Khwe who lived in close proximity to the Mbukushu in Caprivi were subservient to them, paying tribute to their chief and providing various services to their neighbours, such as assisting hunting parties. The Khwe living away from the rivers and Mbukushu settlements were more independent (Boden 2009: 50).

More research is needed to obtain a detailed picture of the historical relationships between San and other ethnic groups, especially given that these relationships have varied considerably according to the groups and time periods in question. Although we must resist the temptation to generalise (in view of all the differing sets of circumstances), by comparing anthropological studies among those San groups which have lived more or less autonomously with the circumstances of those which have lived among agricultural and pastoralist societies, we may conclude, as Becker has done, that: “... gender relations among the San changed with the adoption of distinctive male-dominant features characteristic of southern African pastoralists ...” (Becker 2003: 16). Without doubt, the degree of influence has depended on the structure of the relationship between the San and the neighbouring groups, and the level of San integration into these groups. Where San groups have still been able to follow their hunting and gathering lifestyle to a considerable degree, the influence of neighbouring groups has been diluted and the adaptation of the San to a socio-economic system based on a clear gender hierarchy appears to have been limited or minimal. In San groups which have become more integrated into the economic systems of other ethnic groups, especially as cheap labourers (herders, helpers in the fields, etc.), the influence and adaptation of a gender-stratified system has been far more significant.

18.2.4 Gender relations influenced by the South African army

In the 1970s, the South African Defence Force (SADF) started to employ !Xun and Khwe men as soldiers so as to access their tracking and bush skills.⁹ This was another development that had an enormous impact on gender relations in these San communities, as the women became increasingly confined to the domestic space while the men gained greater access to the outside world through their involvement with the army (see Becker 2003: 16). The army's gender ideology was similar to that of the white farmers, thus women's work came to be restricted to the domestic sphere – a change that effectively created San 'housewives' – while men were paid employees of the army and thus became their families' breadwinners. Women thenceforth experienced a considerably reduced status, in both the family and the wider community (Boden 2008: 116).

In conclusion, contemporary gender relations in San groups cannot be explained only – or even primarily – with reference to the (former) egalitarian gender relations of the traditional pre-colonial San societies, as two interconnected developments have had a far bigger influence on these relations:

- a) the transformation in San communities from hunter-gatherer economies to economies of dependence on wage labour – entailing that men have become the main providers for their families; and
- b) the manifold influences of different neighbours and ideologies – all of which are characterised by a reinforcement of more overtly patriarchal structures than those with which the San were hitherto familiar.¹⁰

18.3 Current gender and generational relations within San communities¹¹

Two standard ways to measure gender equality and women's empowerment are to assess women's access to, and control over, productive resources, and to investigate women's access to savings at the personal and family level (see e.g. FAO 2009: 105). The latter method has only limited relevance in the case of the San: as discussed in the chapter on livelihoods, except in the case of certain projects that specifically deal with the accrual of money (communally or individually) through income-generating initiatives such as craft production, the vast majority of San women – and, indeed, men – do not have any access to formal financial savings, firstly because they are not in a position to save any money, and secondly because many lack the documentation necessary to open transaction and savings accounts with commercial entities (see also FAO 2009: 66, 106). As the difference between men's and women's access to savings is minimal, no conclusions about women's equality or women's empowerment can be drawn by investigating their access to savings.

⁹ From the 1940s through to the 1970s, many Khwe men worked as migrant workers in the South African mines and hence become the cash providers for their families – a situation that probably had some repercussions for gender relations, especially in terms of subsistence roles. This work kept these men away from their families for extended periods, and life at home had to go on without them. When the SADF entered West Caprivi and the Khwe men were relocated to army bases, the impact on gender relations was much more direct and more significant than had been the case during the time of the men's contract labour in the mines.

¹⁰ Even in the pre-colonial era, San groups interacted with their neighbours in manifold ways, and an exchange of cultural influences must have taken place over the eons. In addition, 'traditions' are not immutable; they are subject to modification over time. Nevertheless, cultural change was unquestionably accelerated in colonial times.

¹¹ To supplement our field data for this chapter on gender, we conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with female Hai||om and Khwe students in Windhoek, and with Ju|'hoan women in Donkerbos-Sonneblom (Omaheke Region). This is in addition to consulting the available literature, and drawing also from the experiences and observations accruing from the chapter author's and chapter reviewers' long-term involvement with San groups in Namibia.

Although access to, and control of, resources remains an applicable indicator of women's equality and empowerment, it is insufficient. For the San, household arrangements, division of labour (i.e. the extent to which women carry the burden of household duties, child care, income generation and community duties), inheritance practices, access to healthcare and education, the extent to which gender-based violence occurs or is accepted, and women's participation in decision making, can provide further indications of the degree of gender equality and women's empowerment. These aspects are analysed in the next few subsections.

18.3.1 Household arrangements

We did not collect comprehensive household data for all participants in our research discussions, but the following general tendencies emerged – which are not unique to the San; they apply generally to poorer households in Namibia. Household composition in San communities is rather flexible, and tends to depend on income, availability of livelihood options (e.g. piecework) in the surrounding area, availability of work elsewhere, and infrastructure (e.g. schools and health facilities). If the household has a stable income – even if this often consists solely of the state Old Age Pension – then members of the extended family who have no income at all might join the household for a while. During the school term, households in areas where schools are situated would often host the school-age children of family members living in areas where there are no schools nearby. Both of these factors lead to the situation in San communities (and in Namibia generally) of as many as 15 people residing in a single household, with, in many cases, grandparents (especially grandmothers) taking care of grandchildren because the mother works, often far from home. If such households are in remote areas, the children cared for by grandparents move to the homes of relatives living closer to schools once they are old enough to attend school. Extended families appear to have a network of households in different areas (e.g. different farms and towns, and even different regions in some cases) between which members move according to their specific needs (work, schooling, healthcare etc.) at any given time.

Participants in our research discussions said that usually the older members of a San household are regarded as the household heads, and if there is an elderly man in the household, then he is regarded as the *de facto* head. Remarkably, given the traditions of his people, Hon. Kxau Royal |Ui|o|oo, the only San (Ju|'hoansi) person ever to become a Namibian MP, stated the following in a parliamentary debate on domestic violence: “From an African perspective, the head of the household is the man and I hope this remains that way.” (Hon. |Ui|o|oo, National Assembly, 22 November 2006, cited in GR&AP 2012: 30) Although Hon. |Ui|o|oo was in a unique position and not necessarily representative of his group, this statement perhaps indicates the extent to which gender mores can change in just a few decades, especially in view of anthropologists' earlier descriptions of Ju|'hoan society, which, to quote Draper, “may be the least sexist society of any we have experienced” (Draper 1975: 75).

Discussion participants also said that if men are absent in a San household, an (elderly) woman would be allocated the role of head of household – and indeed, many San households in Namibia today are headed by females. Apparently it is very rare for younger people to head a household, as most live with their parents or grandparents – perhaps in a separate dwelling (often a zinc ‘house’) in their yard, but still sharing meals with their seniors. Only once a young person had built a home *outside* the yard of his/her parents or grandparents was he/she considered to be heading a household, but this was said to be rare due to the lack of economic capacity to sustain a household.¹²

¹² More research is needed to ascertain whether households in which no member is in regular paid employment – this being the case in most San households, where the term ‘breadwinner’ is redundant because many people contribute in one way or the other to the household's survival – might have more of a tendency to centre around women. Our

Sexual relationships with partners from other ethnic groups are common in many areas, and these tend to follow specific patterns. For example: many Hai||om men and women have Damara spouses/partners; some Hai||om and !Xun women in Ohangwena Region are involved with Owambo men; some San women and men in Omusati Region have Owambo spouses/partners; and some Khwe women were married to or had other types of relationships with Mbukushu and Caprivian men. According to discussion participants at different sites (e.g. in Ohangwena and Bwabwata National Park), and as described in the anthropological literature (e.g. Widlok 2005: 31), the relationships between San women and men from other ethnic groups would not fall under the customary law of the latter. Thus, for example, if a child is born to an Owambo man and a San woman out of wedlock, the man would not pay financial restitution or take care of the child. Khwe women who marry richer men from other ethnic groups reportedly remained in poverty because the men would not share their resources with them.

18.3.2 Livelihood strategies and the division of labour

To better understand gender relations in San societies, it is necessary to examine the division of labour: who is responsible for different kinds of work, and what are the implications for gender equality?

Reproductive and productive work

In traditional San societies there was no absolute gender division between reproductive work (i.e. household/domestic work) and productive work. For example, women contributed productively to the household through their veldfood gathering activities, which provided most of the food for the family, and men took part in the reproductive work of raising their children (e.g. minding small children and taking boys on hunting expeditions with the men to teach them hunting skills). As a result of changed livelihood strategies and the influence of neighbouring groups, the pattern has changed significantly in most San communities: as in other Namibian communities, reproductive work is now considered to be the responsibility of women mainly (Felton and Becker 2001: ix), and indeed, most domestic chores (cooking, laundry, taking care of the children etc.) are now carried out by women primarily. Our study has reconfirmed this general change in the division of labour in contemporary San communities, although in some regions the division seems to be more flexible than in others. In Omaheke, although women were said to be responsible for cleaning the house, doing laundry, cooking, caring for the children, watering plants around house and fetching water and firewood, these activities are not the exclusive domain of women: when women are busy, men assist with certain domestic chores (e.g. babysitting, cooking, fetching water or making a fire). It appears that the division of labour in Omaheke is influenced by the seasonal variations in agricultural practices and the availability of crops from gardens/fields. For example, discussion participants at Skoonheid Resettlement Project said that when there is a relative abundance of maize or cowpeas shortly after harvesting, anyone in the household might cook and eat these foods whenever he/she wants, whereas major renovations and repairs in and around the house are chores always reserved for men. In Ohangwena and Omusati, women are responsible for fetching water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and childcare. Similarly, in Kavango, the women fetch water, collect firewood, prepare food and care for the children, and this applied also to the Hai||om in Kunene, Oshana and Oshikoto. In Nyae Nyae Conservancy, Ju|'hoan women are chiefly responsible for childcare, cooking and gathering veldfood, but men can also be involved in these activities.

observations and statements from many discussion participants indicated that elderly women are often the focal persons in their households because the men were prone to mobility in terms of leaving the family home to look for work, or even because they had found another wife (as female Hai||om FGD participants stated).

Further investigation is needed to determine more accurately the varying extents to which San men in different communities take over reproductive duties when women are otherwise occupied. Our Nyae Nyae Conservancy data indicates – as does data from Felton and Becker (2001: 24) – that a strict separation between reproductive and productive work is less prevalent in San groups which are less exposed to outside influences, and which could still hunt and gather (in combination with other livelihood strategies). The Omaheke data similarly indicates that the separation of reproductive and productive work is less clear-cut in areas where wage labour plays a minor role in sustaining livelihoods. Both of these (linked) explanations would confirm what Felton and Becker found: “The more San men have been exposed to the experience of waged labour as a male prerogative and have had contact with neighbouring cultures with rigid gender perceptions and practices, the less likely they are to ‘cross over’.” (Felton and Becker 2001: 24-25)

Cash income

Most income in all of the San communities studied derives from Old Age Pensions, casual work or piecework.

The **Old Age Pension** provided by the Namibian Government for those over the age of 60 gives elderly women and men (and their households) a regular cash income, albeit a small one.¹³ The regular pension payout has placed elderly San women in a stronger position than before Independence due to the decrease in employment opportunities for San men after Independence (especially in respect of farm labour and the cessation of their employment in the SADF). Often, the elderly women are the only ‘breadwinners’ in the household. However, the pension amount is so small that it cannot meet the economic needs of an entire household, especially a large one.

In general, more **casual work** opportunities are available for San men than for women, and men’s work is often better paid. For example, men across our research sites had undertaken the following forms of casual work: repairing houses with clay (e.g. in Caprivi); clearing fields; herding livestock (e.g. in Ohangwena, Omusati, Caprivi and Kavango); doing casual or seasonal work on commercial farms (e.g. in Kunene, Oshikoto and Omaheke) and farms in communal areas (e.g. in Omaheke); and doing temporary work for companies (e.g. construction, road construction and fencing in Oshikoto, Omaheke and Otjozondjupa). Women had done casual domestic work for households in neighbouring groups or had worked in crop fields (e.g. in Ohangwena, Omusati and Caprivi).

Piecework for men included offloading trucks (e.g. in Katima Mulilo and Oshivelo), rendering services at *cuca* shops (e.g. in Tsintsabis, Gobabis, Corridor 13 and Outjo) and fetching water (e.g. in Bwabwata National Park (BNP)). Women rendered services at *cuca* shops, styled other women’s hair, mended clothes or did other people’s laundry. Allegedly some San women also occasionally rendered sexual services to (mostly non-San) men in urban areas, in resettlement projects with beneficiaries of mixed ethnic backgrounds, and in small settlements in communal areas (see also Sylvain 2010: 97; and International Labour Organization (ILO) 2012). Reportedly there had also been cases of young men rendering sexual services to older women with financial means, i.e. ‘sugar mummies’ (e.g. in Corridor 13). Discussion participants were generally reluctant to talk about the prevalence of transactional sex in their communities due to the sensitivity of this topic.

Reportedly both men and women engaged in **small businesses**, selling small quantities of sugar, tea, home-made *vetkoek* (deep-fried dough/pastry), ice and other such basic items at home.

¹³ The amount was N\$550 per month at the time of our research. In April 2013 it was increased to N\$600 per month.

Both men and women were involved in the **sale of natural products** – work that is usually seasonal. For example, San men in Oshikoto sold *omajova* (termite mushrooms) during the rainy season, and women in Ohangwena and Omusati collected and sold grass for thatching houses. At many sites, both men and women sold firewood. In Caprivi Region, San women had engaged in the harvesting and informal and uncontrolled sale of Devil's Claw (i.e. without the external support of an NGO). Where harvesting of this product was managed through the Sustainably Harvested Devil's Claw (SHDC) Project supported by the Centre for Research, Information and Action in Africa – Southern Africa Development and Consulting (CRIAA SA-DC), i.e. in the BNP, Nyae Nyae Conservancy and N̄a Jaqna Conservancy, many more men were involved:

Table 18.1: Number of male and female Devil's Claw harvesters supported by CRIAA SA-DC in Bwabwata National Park and the two conservancies in Otjozondjupa Region*

Year 2012	Number of harvesters			Percentage of female harvesters
	Female	Male	Total	
Bwabwata National Park	363	169	459	79%
N̄a Jaqna Conservancy	227	251	478	48%
Nyae Nyae Conservancy	45	23	68	66%

* Data provided by CRIAA SA-DC in October 2013

For the resettlement projects in Omaheke, i.e. Vergenoeg, Gembokfontein, Tsjaka/Ben Hur and Donkerbos-Sonneblom, where Devil's Claw harvesting was supported by CRIAA SA-DC, Rudd reported that most of the registered harvesters were male (Rudd 2012: 30). This was due to the SHDC Project's rule that only one person per household could register as a harvester, and only the registered person would receive payment directly from the buyer. Although female household members participated in the harvesting and primary processing, they were not formally registered and thus could not receive direct payments from the buyer.¹⁴ Therefore, the differences between regions, and the potential role of NGOs in influencing the gender division of labour and distribution of income generated from natural products, is a subject that clearly requires further investigation.

The **sale of crafts** was undertaken by San women and men at many research sites (e.g. in Nyae Nyae Conservancy and Omaheke, Ohangwena, Oshana and Kunene Regions). Men generally produced carvings and crafts made of wire (which require the handling of hand tools such as pliers, with which men are more familiar), and tools such as knives, bows and arrows. Women generally produced jewellery, baskets and clothing. When NGOs were not involved in the marketing of the crafts, access to markets tended to be a limiting factor. Although more women than men were involved in, for example, the craft projects run by the Omba Arts Trust in partnership with the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) and the Habitafrica Foundation (see Box 14.1 on page 476), men were not excluded from such initiatives, and in some of them, particular product lines (e.g. wood carvings and wire-craft products) had been developed specifically to engage men. However, for various reasons, but mainly due to competing income-generating opportunities, these initiatives targeting men met with highly fluctuating degrees of success.

Other **tourism-related activities** were more site-specific, and were undertaken mainly in the Nyae Nyae and N̄a Jaqna Conservancies and around Etosha. However, there is great potential for the development of tourism-related activities in other areas, and various efforts have been made to foster such activities – for example the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) is trying to introduce

¹⁴ One reason for the dominance of men there might have been that craft projects were implemented at the same time, and women might have preferred to generate income from making and selling crafts (see Rudd 2012: 30).

game farming on its San resettlement farms. In this context it is therefore important to emphasise the conclusions reached by Felton and Becker in 2001:

“In principle both men and women, young and old, possess ‘marketable’ skills that could be put to use in demonstrations for or interactions with tourists. These skills include tracking, hunting, gathering bush foods and medicinal plants, preparing and cooking bush foods, healing, singing, dancing and manufacturing crafts. In practice, however, young men have benefited disproportionately from tourism enterprises, particularly in the commercial sector.” (Felton and Becker 2001: 33)

More than a decade later, our study has made clear that this pattern continued to develop. Where private safari companies employ the San, it is the young men who are taken on as hunting guides and camp labourers – also because both San and tourists generally view hunting as a ‘male’ activity. These San men also tend to have higher levels of education than either San women or older men, and hence are more fluent in English and Afrikaans, and they have more experience in dealing with outsiders. It is likely that gender stereotypes vis-à-vis the ‘natural’ division of labour, and hence employers’ preference of employing men for certain types of tourism-related work, have also contributed to women’s absence in this sphere of work.

Community-based tourism models also risk contributing to the increasingly marked stratification of San communities along gender and generational lines: we found that those responsible for managing San community-based campsites were overwhelmingly young men proficient in English, and these were also the guides who accompanied tourists on ‘bush walks’ – despite the tradition of women being the main gatherers of veldfood.

In 2001, in both commercial and community-based tourism ventures, San women were employed mainly as cleaners, thus they earned far less than was paid for the types of tourism-related work dominated by men (Felton and Becker 2001: 33–34). This might have changed over the last 12 years with growing gender awareness and the recognition that Namibia’s initial community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) programme was rather gender-insensitive (which was at least partly due to the lack of women’s participation in consultative meetings). However, challenges still remain.

For example, today, women in the BNP and conservancies supported by Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) are also employed as community resource monitors (CRMs). However, they are paid less for this work than their male counterparts earn for their work as community game guards (CGGs),¹⁵ because the CRMs are not expected to work for as many hours as the CGGs work – as agreed when the first CRM positions were established in the early stages of the IRDNC programme in conservancies in Caprivi in the late 1990s. The traditional leaders had proposed making the CRM position both a part-time and flexi-time position for women, to allow for extending the benefits to more women instead of employing fewer women on similar salaries to those of the CGGs. Apparently this was also the women’s preference, as it would better enable them to accommodate their household duties including child care.¹⁶ At the time of our research in Nyae Nyae Conservancy, only four of the 23 Jul’hoan employees of the conservancy were female, and in N#á Jaqna Conservancy only two of the 12 San employees were female (i.e. 17% in both cases). This is because these conservancies offer ranger jobs primarily, and women are generally hesitant to work as rangers.¹⁷ Thus, despite efforts to integrate women into CBNRM activities, the gendered division of tasks continues, as does the associated tendency to pay men more regular and/or higher

¹⁵ For successes, challenges and constraints of the CBNRM programme see Flintan 2001.

¹⁶ Personal communication, Karine Nuulimba (IRDNC), 28.10.2013.

¹⁷ Personal communication, Lara Diez, (Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNFN)), 23.10.2013.

incomes. This situation poses the risk of further gender stratification in San communities, and this risk will have to be monitored and addressed when planning and implementing tourism-related activities in the future.

Animal husbandry

In general, where livestock was kept (e.g. in Omusati, Ohangwena, Otjozondjupa and Omaheke), it was said that the San men were responsible for husbandry (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 28). The few exceptions were due to the specific circumstances of the communities concerned – for example, Hai||om women on commercial farms in Outjo District (Kunene Region) were chiefly responsible for livestock management because the men were working as farm labourers.

Cultivation of crops

Both San men and women engage in the cultivation of crops in the northern regions of Namibia, where crop cultivation forms part of the agricultural production system (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 29), and the various tasks involved in the cultivation of crops were usually divided between men and women, the latter undertaking the tasks that are compatible with child care. We found this to be the case also on resettlement projects in Omaheke Region where irrigated and rain-fed crop cultivation is promoted by the MLR in partnership with civil society organisations. Here, however, the vast majority of those engaged in crop cultivation were middle-aged and elderly men and women; it appears that the San youth in this region – where livestock farming traditionally dominates – are considerably less interested in crop cultivation. This was cause for serious complaint on the part of the elders, as a significant proportion of the youth, for example in Drimiopsis and Skoonheid, refused to assist their parents in any activity associated with crop cultivation; the youth were more interested in doing piecework and casual work. (See Chapter 4, “Engagement of the youth in agricultural and communal activities”, page 82.)

Hunting and gathering

As already mentioned in this chapter and others, in traditional San societies men predominated in hunting, and women predominated in gathering veldfood, although gathering was a less gender-specific task than hunting. Nowadays, hunting – in the few places where this practice is still allowed – is *exclusively* the preserve of men, and women are generally the gatherers, but men still do some gathering. In this regard it is important to consider San women’s knowledge – and specifically that of the elderly women – with regard to the environment: this knowledge is a traditional intellectual resource that should be preserved and promoted; undoubtedly, if utilised in tourism-related and other economic ventures, it could prove extremely valuable.

Employment

Employment opportunities are rare for both men and women in San communities, due primarily to their low levels of education and the prevailing stereotypes of the San. Nevertheless, it appears that relatively more employment opportunities are open to men than to women (e.g. farmwork and construction work) (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 35), not least because men tend to be more mobile than women due to the latter’s household and childcare obligations; this mobility makes it easier for men to look for employment opportunities.¹⁸

¹⁸ In the rare instances of San women finding formal employment, for childcare they rely on social networks – usually composed of female members of the extended family, and sometimes composed of neighbours, friends and others.

In sum, both men and women engage in a variety of income-generating activities, but it seems that men generally have more opportunities than women for such engagement. It must be stressed that most of these activities generate less income, and/or less *regular* income, than the Old Age Pension provides, hence elderly San women are often the most economically advantaged members of their households (at least in households with only one, female, recipient of this pension). Nevertheless, through certain income-generating activities such as craft-production projects, women are given the opportunity to earn some money, and this additional cash contributes significantly to their families' income – as exemplified in group resettlement projects in Omaheke and Ohangwena. Most of the income earned by women is used to buy maize-meal and other basic necessities such as sugar, tea, coffee and soap, thereby improving the household's food security and hygiene. Some is used to pay for healthcare services at clinics. Occasionally, when larger amounts are earned – through bigger craft orders for example – the extra income is invested in different pursuits: reportedly, for example, (male) artists at Ekoka Resettlement Project in Ohangwena invested their extra income in agriculture (e.g. paying for the hire of a tractor for ploughing), and women at Drimiopsis and Skoonheid Resettlement Projects in Omaheke put money aside for their children's education (e.g. to cover school and hostel fees, and to purchase essentials such as toiletries for the children residing in hostels).

Many men in San communities in the recent past and still today have faced difficulties engaging in regular income-generating activities, and thus are economically inactive for much of the time – at least in areas where subsistence agriculture, hunting and gathering play only minor roles. The gender ideology that some San communities adopted from dominant neighbouring groups (as outlined earlier in this chapter) has resulted in the belief that women are responsible for virtually all reproductive work in addition to pursuing work to obtain small amounts of income or food, and this is reflected in their day-to-day activities. By contrast, men in such communities are regularly confronted with the challenge of an absence of productive work opportunities, and hence a lack of opportunities to fulfil either the 'breadwinner' role allocated to men by patriarchal ideology, or the 'important contributor to household food security' role prescribed in the hunter-gatherer ethos.

Although this situation is not unique to San communities, the *de facto* responsibility of women for the domestic sphere has to be considered when planning development initiatives targeting women, as their engagement in household and childcare chores limits the time that women can dedicate to other activities. This applied, for example, in Nyae Nyae Conservancy where the Jul'hoan women said that they could not always attend the literacy classes on offer simply because their domestic chores took up so much time. In the *Gender diagnosis: Institutional strengthening and democratic governance contributing to improve life conditions [sic] of urban and rural settlements of vulnerable communities in Namibia*, commissioned by the Habitafrica Foundation, it was noted that at one of the San resettlement projects in Omaheke, namely Drimiopsis, single women found it difficult to attend to the cultivated plots due to their engagement in domestic chores and childcare, although it was also stated that they had established informal solidarity networks to share household and cultivation tasks (Feal 2011: 20).¹⁹

¹⁹ Overall, the burden of labour associated with productive and reproductive roles in Namibia will vary in accordance with specific circumstances: it differs between urban and rural areas, and depends on livelihood strategies and other factors, such as available infrastructure. In the semi-arid and arid regions of rural Namibia, where farming methods are relatively labour- and time-extensive (low labour and time input), both women and men, San and non-San, still have a considerable amount of spare time, partly due to rural unemployment. In resettlement projects with easy access to water, there is more time available than in places where water has to be fetched from some distance away. Furthermore, as mentioned above, in some areas San men are willing to take over some reproductive tasks, whereas this is not the case in other areas.

18.3.3 Access to, and control over, resources

Generally speaking, participants in our research discussions reported that their communities had very limited access to resources, and very little control over the resources to which they did have access (e.g. income, land and livestock). Nevertheless, in many cases, men and women had equal access to, and equal control over, the few resources available.

Cash income

According to discussion participants, cash income (primarily Old Age Pension money and money derived from piecework) tends to belong to the person to whom it is given or who earned it, but as already indicated, San men are more likely than women to have work opportunities (see also Feal 2011: 103; Felton and Becker 2001: 35; and FAO 2009: 79). At certain research sites, and depending on individual arrangements, a wife and husband might manage the household income jointly; but in most cases, the earners (both men and women) can decide for themselves how to use their earnings. For example, 10 of the 12 Ju|'hoan women who participated in the FGD at Donkerbos-Sonneblom (San resettlement project in Omaheke) had their own income: eight drew an income from the production and sale of crafts, and two were hostel matrons. All of these women stated that they had control over the income that they earned, although two, i.e. elderly women, decided together with their partners on how to use their income.

Significantly, it was often said in the research discussions that women tend to spend more money than men did on household necessities.

Food

Our study data conveys that in general – with site-to-site variations – it is the women who prepare, cook and serve food to the other household members, and at many sites men receive the biggest share of the food (see also Feal 2011: 15). There were also indications that some specific food items (e.g. meat) are accessed and controlled by men primarily.²⁰ At many sites, parents (mothers and fathers alike) indicated that they share their food with their children, but at some sites, such as the resettlement projects around Okongo in Ohangwena Region, it was clear that parents paid far less attention to their children's nutritional needs, as the adults were affected by their need to drink *tombo* on a near daily basis. Given this state of affairs, it is difficult to make general statements, and more research is needed to confirm the true situation with regard to women's access to food.

Livestock

Animal husbandry was not said to be an important livelihood activity at any of our research sites, although a few discussion participants in certain regions (e.g. Omaheke) aspired to being livestock farmers. When San individuals owned livestock, this tended to be small stock (mainly goats) rather than large stock (cattle), and our study data shows that when San owned animals, they tended to do so on an individual rather than a collective basis. Stock could be owned by men or women, and sometimes even children. This was explicitly said to be the case in Omaheke, Otjozondjupa,

²⁰ The recent FAO study found the consumption of meat to be more prevalent in male-headed households. Female-headed households at Ohoulamo (Ohangwena) had consumed an average of 2.5 different foodstuffs in the last 24 hours, while the average for male-headed households at the same site 3.57. Residents of Makaravan (Caprivi) consumed a greater variety of foodstuffs, possibly because their close proximity to the town of Katima Mulilo gave them better access to meat and fish (FAO 2009: 49-50).

Kunene, Oshikoto and Caprivi.²¹ Importantly, at no site was it said that livestock ownership and control would be restricted to men.²² However, due to their better employment opportunities, men were more likely than women to have invested in livestock (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 28).²³

Felton and Becker's research led them to conclude the following:

“... stock ownership has the potential to become a stratifying element in many San communities, with a clear bias towards male ownership and handling of animals, in particular cattle. This bias is further inherent in many governmental and non-governmental interventions. Both men and women have internalised gendered assumptions prevalent in other cultures according to which animals are regarded as the property of men and work involving animals is regarded as men's work.” (Felton and Becker 2001: 29)

In 2007, civil society organisations and the government started paying attention to this matter of livestock ownership, and a number of San women (e.g. in Omaheke) have been registered as the primary beneficiaries of donations of small stock. Despite the absence of practical restrictions on San women owning livestock, the continued risk of gender stratification in San communities in terms of animal husbandry will require special attention whenever livestock donations are made or promoted – for example by the OPM, with funding from the Namibian-German Special Initiative Programme (NGSIP) which is managed by the National Planning Commission.

Land

As discussed in Chapter 13, formal land ownership or tenure security was found to be very rare among the San in general. Regarding gender in this regard, as Werner stated, “Giving women land rights equal to those of men remains a challenge in Namibia.” (Werner 2008: 3; see also Ambunda 2008: 57).

Some San communities are living on communal land which traditional authorities (TAs) of other ethnic groups have allocated to them. San participants in our research discussions in Caprivi and Omusati explicitly stated that the headmen of their respective neighbouring communities had allocated land to them on behalf of the applicable TAs. Reportedly the San in Omusati, including 22 women, had registered their land rights with the communal land board.²⁴ If San elsewhere had done the same, there is no data confirming this.²⁵

With regard to the communal areas in Namibia, the FAO reported as follows in 2009:

²¹ The exception to this general pattern of individual livestock ownership is found in the resettlement projects in Ohangwena, where, through the government's Draught Animal Power Acceleration Programme, cattle were donated to individual San trainees, the intention being that the cattle would benefit the entire San community. The San in these projects thus considered these animals to be their communal or collective property, and consequently, nobody in particular was appointed to look after them, and nobody volunteered to take up this responsibility, not even the trainees themselves. As the animals were often left unattended, they would wander off and get lost at times.

²² At most sites where livestock was evidently not important for the San livelihoods, we did not raise the question of who owned and controlled livestock.

²³ At one site in Omusati it was said that the cattle of a deceased man would be taken by his own relatives (i.e. his wife and children would not inherit them), which implies that cattle are regarded as the property of the corporate kinship group – see the following subsection on inheritance practices.

²⁴ Personal communication with the headman of Amarika on 18 October 2012.

²⁵ The land boards record only the name, sex, nationality and date of birth of the person to whom a customary land right is allocated (Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002, regulation 5). As ethnicity or language group are not recorded, there is no way to ascertain how many San have registered their customary land rights.

“Not many women own land rights and women can only access land through their husbands or other male relatives. Under most customary systems in Namibia, widowed women do not inherit land but, depending on the goodwill of her husband’s relatives, a widow is allowed to stay on her husband’s land until death or remarriage.” (FAO 2009: 73)²⁶

However, neither our own study data nor the available literature reflect this general assertion. To the contrary, Khwe, Hai||om and Ju|’hoan participants in our gender FGDs, for example, stated that women *can* own land, and we heard of only one case (reported by a young Khwe woman) of a widow (i.e. Khwe) having been forced to leave the land on which she had lived with her husband. (This woman moved back to her own family.)

As mentioned in Chapter 13 on access to land, and in certain regional chapters, land tenure in group resettlement projects remains insecure. However, a distinction has to be made between land tenure arrangements (including the formalisation of title deeds under the Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002) and the arrangements made by civil society organisations at certain projects. In Omaheke and Ohangwena, resettlement projects in which the Livelihood Programme²⁷ supports the establishment of sustainable livelihoods, garden plots and crop fields were allocated to individual households for cultivation. At Donkerbos-Sonneblom in Omaheke, for example, the Ju|’hoan women who participated in the gender FGD reported that land ownership, i.e. the ownership of crop fields and gardens, tended to be shared equally between men and women, but for the annual distribution of seeds, these plots and fields were registered in one person’s name, usually that of the acknowledged head of the household. This implies that both men and women were registered as ‘owners’ of crop fields and gardens, depending on the gender of the household head. Among married couples it was usually the husband who was registered as the owner, but the gender FGD participants nonetheless felt that control and ownership over the land was shared. This is not wholly unexpected, as the women were actively involved in the cultivation of these gardens and crop fields, and actively participated in making decision about their cultivation.

Since private land ownership is currently absent in San communities – as is formalised customary land allocation to individual households – it would be difficult to find evidence that San women are significantly specifically disadvantaged in this respect. However, the extent of gender equality in land-use practices and informal tenure rights at group resettlement schemes will require closer monitoring in the future, and data should be gathered on the allocation of plots to men and women on the resettlement farms handed over to San communities by the San Development Programme (SDP) run by the OPM, and the impacts of these allocation on gender relations.²⁸ Additionally,

²⁶ It should be noted that under the Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002, the registered customary land of a deceased husband reverts to the TA for reallocation to the surviving wife (section 26), thus widows have the right to remain on the land in question, even if they remarry.

²⁷ This programme, called LISUP in Omaheke and LIPROSAN in Ohangwena, is implemented by the DRFN and the Habitafrica Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement and the applicable regional councils.

²⁸ Another issue requiring further investigation with regard to resettlement projects is related to the frequent lack of livelihood options in some of these projects: young and middle-aged San men residing on these farms frequently move to look for casual work or piecework in towns or on communal or commercial farms, leaving their wives and children behind. The same is true for young unmarried San women. Such job-seeking behaviour of younger men and women stems from a limited interest in agricultural activities, but is also due to the potential financial gains to be made from casual work and short- or long-term employment, which is usually more financially rewarding than any of the farming activities in the resettlement projects. Indeed, even if sufficient farm inputs and productive assets can be accessed, crop cultivation and animal husbandry tend merely to contribute in some small measure to household food security. This income-seeking or job-seeking behaviour of young resettled San mirrors the generally observed patterns of labour allocation among peasant farm households in rural southern Africa described by Low (1986). Low points out that the history of labour migration from the marginal arid environments of southern Africa to mines and urban areas where there is limited potential for increased agricultural output, means that it makes

gender-disaggregated data showing how many San have actually registered customary rights to land under the Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002 would be needed for assessing any gender discrepancies in land allocations in communal areas.

All told, it appears that in San communities, control of resources is not as manifestly disadvantageous to women as it is in some other Namibian communities, where resources are controlled by men primarily (see for example FAO 2009: 69). Nonetheless, certain resources – particularly cash incomes and livestock – are more accessible to San men than to San women, hence more San men than women are in control of these.

18.3.4 Inheritance practices

In traditional San societies, ownership of private property was very limited, therefore the quantities of items that might be inherited were small. As Widlok has pointed out, unlike many other groups in Namibia, San groups were more concerned about the exchange of items between living people, and less concerned about ‘corporate property’ in the form of the accumulation of property in a corporate kinship group based on descent rather than marriage (Widlok 1999: 29; see also GR&AP (LAC) 2005a and 2005b). In many regions (e.g. at most sites in Omusati, Ohangwena, Omaheke, Otjozondjupa, Kunene and Oshikoto) our research revealed that a deceased San man’s wife and children inherit the biggest share of his property, but the distribution of that property depends on individual arrangements and negotiations. For example, if the man’s relatives insist on receiving specific items, they might prevail, depending on the negotiating power of the widow and her close relatives.

Kavango and Caprivi were exceptions in this regard. In Kavango it was said that when a husband dies, his relatives/brother take the family’s livestock, leaving just one or two animals for the widow and children.²⁹ The fields might be left to the widow, but the husband’s brother can take her children if he so wishes. In Caprivi it was said that the biggest share of any inheritance goes to the deceased husband’s relatives, and the widow is sometimes left with nothing, so she has to return to her own family. At one site in the BNP, discussion participants mentioned the custom of the deceased’s brother possibly ‘taking over’ his widow – “if she was a good wife”.³⁰ These examples suggest that the Khwe and !Xun in Kavango and Caprivi have adopted the inheritance practices of neighbouring ethnic groups, but further historical research would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

18.3.5 Poverty

Our research data reconfirms that most members of San communities – both men and women – are living in abject poverty. The wealth-ranking exercises at our research sites made evident that the San perceive themselves as belonging to the poorest sections of Namibian society. Regarding gender, many of the factors that participants in these exercises considered to be characteristics of the relatively better off, and thus critical for upward mobility, remain more accessible for San men than for San women – examples being employment (including casual work) and livestock ownership in Ohangwena and Omusati, and education in Kunene and Omusati. Cultivation was

sound economic sense for a rural household to release from agricultural duties any family member who might obtain some income through employment elsewhere.

²⁹ Most San do not own livestock, and if they do, they own very few.

³⁰ For more information on the practice of widow inheritance (levirate) in non-San communities, see LeBeau 2005: 117-120. Namibia’s Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC) has proposed a new Intestate Succession Act which would outlaw this practice if applied without the widow’s free consent (LRDC 2012).

another ‘upward-mobility’ factor mentioned at many sites, and although this was not regarded as a predominantly male activity, large-scale cultivation requires physical power and/or equipment and technology, both of which are – according to internalised gender values – more readily available to men than to women.

In the gender FGDs, participants explained that although both men and women were living in poverty, women were more affected by this state of affairs, for two reasons: firstly, women had fewer opportunities to find piecework or casual work; and secondly, women felt that they should shoulder the responsibility of care for the entire household.

“The women suffer more [from poverty], although the men also suffer. When there is no food or water in the family, it is the woman who struggles to get them. The women do a lot of domestic chores and therefore they feel more of the pain that poverty brings. They care for the sick, they care for children, they care for the husbands and they want their children to go to school.”

– Female Khwe participant in the gender FGD in Windhoek

One strategy that some San women have employed to escape poverty (mentioned at a handful of our research sites only after careful probing) is that of engaging in relationships with non-San men whom the women perceived as being rich – despite the women’s awareness that such relationships could eventually leave them worse off than they were before. This was also mentioned by Felton and Becker (2001: 62) and Sylvain (2010: 96). When we asked in the gender FGD in Windhoek whether San men employ the strategy of engaging in relationships with rich women of other ethnic groups, a Hai||om woman replied, “Which bushman will get a rich woman?” This statement captures in a nutshell the unequal power relations in Namibian society, in terms of both gender and ethnicity. Indeed, in their relationships with non-San men, San women are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination – gender, ethnic and (related to the latter) class – which are all interrelated. Sylvain called this “intersectional discrimination” in referring to the “ways that forms of discrimination compound each other and are inseparable” (Sylvain 2010: 89).

18.3.6 Health³¹

Access to health facilities: This is a matter of serious concern for San men and women alike, as noted in Chapter 17 on health. Distance, costs and discriminatory behaviour on the part of healthcare personnel make it difficult for San to access the healthcare that they need and are entitled to receive.

“More often than not, people from the San community, especially pregnant women, are sent back from health centres because they are told to first go and wash themselves because they allegedly stink and are smelly; many of these people who are told to go back are living below the poverty-line and in traditional huts with no access to water. For them, having a bar of soap is a luxury; are nurses not trained to deal with situations like these? This is degrading, disrespectful, insensitive and also amounts to indirect discrimination against the San because this mainly happens to people from the San community; many of these people will usually not return to the health centre and are thus left to deal with their health problems on their own; this is really sad.”

– Moses ||Khumub, Namibian San Council, as quoted in Office of the Ombudsman, *Baseline Study Report on Human Rights in Namibia*, 2013, p. 89

³¹ We are grateful to Dr Tamsin Bell, a medical doctor working with San communities in Omaheke, who provided much of the information in this section.

Since women are usually the persons responsible for children and extended family members, it is probably the case that they are more familiar than their menfolk with the shortcomings of different aspects of the Namibian healthcare system as they relate specifically to the San.

Health-seeking behaviour: In Omaheke at least, this behaviour differs between men and women in San communities.³² For example, the rates of hypertension (high blood pressure) detected and treated at outreach clinics in Omaheke are significantly higher in San women than in San men. However, this may be due to the fact that far more San women than men attend the clinics for a check-up. Generally speaking, San men tend to wait until symptoms indicate that there is actually something wrong with them before consulting a doctor, i.e. they seem to place little value on preventative healthcare measures. Women also tend to be the health advocates for their families and communities, and normally, when healthcare personnel visit a village, it is the women who alert them to the presence of residents who may be in need of medical attention. It is also the more educated San women who request that their children or family members be tested for TB.

Antenatal care (ANC): In the *Namibia Standard Treatment Guidelines*, the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS) recommends that ANC be provided to all pregnant women (MoHSS 2011: 707-710), but our study has found that many San women do not access ANC, whether regularly or at all.³³ This is due partly to the distances involved in travelling to healthcare facilities and the lack of transport options, and partly to a lack of awareness of primary healthcare options. Many San women do not recognise the importance of attending ANC appointments during pregnancy, and many do not have the means to do so even if they know that they should. Therefore, many go to healthcare facilities only when a problem arises and it is too late for preventative action. Also, many do not receive regular multivitamins and few complete a full course of tetanus immunisations. The risk of maternal mortality – mainly triggered by severe eclampsia (uncontrolled high blood pressure), post-partum haemorrhage or obstructed/prolonged labour – is significantly increased by the failure of San women to attend ANC appointments, as this means that blood pressure is not measured, low-lying placenta cannot be identified, and any malposition of the foetus (e.g. a breach or transverse lie) is not discovered. High-risk deliveries at home are thus more likely to occur in San communities than in other communities.

Giving birth at home: The attendance of a skilled healthcare professional at delivery has a direct influence on maternal mortality and morbidity, and yet, many San women at most of our research sites still give birth at home, either because this is their personal preference, or because they lack transport (or the means to pay for the available transport) to the nearest hospital or clinic. Hence obstetric conditions such as haemorrhage and obstruction may go unidentified or untreated until they have become emergencies. Such emergencies may then be compounded by the unavailability of transport or the distance being too great to facilitate rapid transfer of the patient to the nearest healthcare facility. Traditional birthing practices such as cutting the umbilical cord with a stick or (as often happens) an old pair of kitchen scissors or a knife increases the risk of infection for both mother and child. Traditional breastfeeding methods (which include disposing of colostrum and feeding the baby sugar water for the first few days) also compromise the health of both mother and child. All these practices continue in many of the San communities visited by Dr Bell in Omaheke.

Family planning: The use of reliable methods of contraception is low in San communities, and unplanned pregnancies are frequent, especially among teenagers. The most popular contraception

³² This was one of the observations of Dr Bell in working with San communities in Omaheke.

³³ This was confirmed by Dr Bell in respect of the San women in Omaheke.

method among San women who do choose to use contraception is the intramuscular (IM) injection of either depot progesterone every three months or norethistrone every two months. Obviously this requires regular attendance at a clinic or regular outreach visits from health professionals, and the most common reasons for cessation of IM injections are the long distances to clinics, poor access to transport and a lack of understanding of the need for regular injections. (Illiterate women are unable to read the information written in their health passports, and many do not keep track of the date of their follow-up appointment.) Unplanned pregnancies may have serious consequences for both maternal and child health: multiple pregnancies increase the incidence of anaemia and other nutritional deficiencies among women – indeed anaemia was often clinically apparent in the San women examined by Dr Bell. Multiple closely spaced pregnancies also increase the risk of post-partum haemorrhage, dysfunctional labour, uterine prolapse/rupture, eclampsia, pre-term delivery and low birth weight. Maternal age also has a direct correlation with mortality: the World Health Organization (WHO) advises that the highest risk of maternal mortality is in women under the age of 15. Teenage pregnancies are common among the San population. Although young San children are often cared for by the extended family, raising a large number of children naturally also has consequences for San women's economic status. Thus, unavailability of reliable contraception and health education may be a significant factor in the feminisation of poverty.

HIV/AIDS: San women are a highly vulnerable group in terms of HIV infection. As mentioned above and in Chapter 17, San women sometimes engage in sexual relationships with non-San men due to the relative wealth and higher social status of the latter. As reported in our discussions in various regions, San girls are known to enter into relationships with 'sugar daddies' from an early age. Also, according to Felton and Becker (2001: 52), non-San men often prefer San women as casual sex partners because allegedly they are "cleaner" (i.e. less likely to be carriers of sexually transmitted infections). These factors accelerate the spread of HIV in some San communities, especially among the women (as described by Lee and Susser 2006: 50). In any event the women carry the greatest burden in San households affected by HIV/AIDS, due to the fact that they are more likely than men to take responsibility for their children's health (see for example Feal 2011: 1; and Felton and Becker 2001: 47), and are also more likely to be the carers of other sick family members. As Feal found at Drimiopsis Resettlement Farm in Omaheke, "Women are the ones who suffer the most the consequences of AIDS [sic] from other people, as it represents an extra domestic burden for women and girls, who must assume the main load of attention to sick people at home, as well as support those families also affected." (Feal 2011: 8) It seems fair to say that Feal's findings can be generalised across most San communities in Namibia, as at most of our own research sites it was specifically said that 'women are responsible for sick people'.

18.3.7 Education

As outlined in the regional chapters and Chapter 16 on education, San men and women alike have very low levels of education.

Through interviews with individual residents at most of our research sites, we collected information about their own level of education, their children's levels of education, and the reasons for their generally low levels of education.³⁴ Particularly relevant in the context of gender is that more than a quarter of the female interviewees stated that they had dropped out of formal education for gender-related reasons, particularly **teenage pregnancy and early marriage** – the other main reason being

³⁴ As noted in Chapter 16 (page 524), the data collected on education is not representative as certain factors were beyond our control, but the data does allow for identifying general trends.

a **lack of financial resources**. In the BNP – where we convened an FGD on education – the main reason cited for girls dropping out of school was their engagement with ‘sugar daddies’: according to the participants, girls needed money to buy the soap and toiletries that would make them feel comfortable in the school environment, but ultimately they got pregnant and dropped out of school. Felton and Becker also found that sexual relationships had negative impacts on San girls’ education (Felton and Becker 2001: 39).

In the FGDs with San students in Windhoek, it was confirmed that in comparison to San boys, San girls are seriously disadvantaged with regard to continuing and completing their primary and secondary education. Again pregnancy and early marriage were cited as the main reasons for this. Indeed, three of the 12 female participants got pregnant while in secondary school, but support from their parents enabled them to continue their education. Some of the female participants also remembered friends back home who got pregnant and dropped out of secondary school, some opting for marriage instead of completing school. It came to light in these FGDs that it takes great motivation and moral support for such girls to continue with their schooling, and such support is often lacking. The female participants confirmed that access to (and effective use of) contraceptives is an aspect of primary healthcare that requires greater attention in relation to San adolescent and sexually active girls.

The students in Windhoek cited two other primary reasons for San girls being disadvantaged in education relative to boys. One of these is **personal hygiene** – a reason cited often in the regional discussions as well. The students agreed that adolescent girls require more financial resources to meet their personal needs, not least because of menstruation. As one of the female students put it:

“You know boys have less personal needs than us. A boy can be given a piece of soap and he is told to go school. But girls need something more than a piece of soap. We need specific toiletries items ... and this costs money.”

The other primary reason is **distance to school**. During school terms, learners in San communities located far away from schools are obliged to stay with family friends or other host households located close to schools. This situation arises primarily in areas where there are no school hostels or the hostel fees are unaffordable for San households (which is often the case). In one FGD, male students pointed out that for girls it is more risky than for boys to stay with other families away from their parents because of the possibility of sexual harassment. Often a girl’s parents will keep her at home to help with domestic chores rather than expose her to this risk. It was also pointed out that girls are more likely than boys to risk sexual harassment or rape by walking long distances to school – not that they have much choice. As reported at some of our research sites, and as also mentioned by Felton and Becker (2001: 42), even the school hostels fail to provide safe sanctuary for female learners. Many hostels lack security infrastructure (e.g. perimeter fences and/or burglar bars), and their doors frequently remain unlocked overnight. Furthermore, the support and supervision that hostel matrons (most of whom are non-San) are tasked to provide is sometimes inadequate.³⁵

Apart from the above, two other reasons for the poor educational levels of San women, and their consequences, can be extrapolated from other findings of our study and from other literature.

Firstly, San girls have been described as having generally **lower self-esteem** than San boys, especially in the school environment. Felton and Becker noted the following:

³⁵ Although these problems are not unique to San girls, but may be experienced by any female learner in Namibia, for the San they are aggravated by poverty and the sexual stereotyping of San.

“Whereas both male and female San learners experienced verbal abuse in the form of being called dumb by other learners, girls seemed to have internalised such stereotypes more than boys, and in interviews themselves questioned their own learning capacity, something the boys did not do.” (2001: 42-43).

Secondly, as noted in many chapters herein, **fewer elderly San women than elderly San men had attended school**, and these women also had fewer opportunities than men to become proficient in Afrikaans, English or the languages of neighbouring groups. Throughout their lives, these women were clearly disadvantaged wherever communication in a language other than a San language was required (e.g. in government offices or in community discussions with outsiders). Having some ability to communicate in one or more other languages enabled (elderly) San men to attain some measure of access to the outside world, whereas the social relations of (elderly) women had been much more confined to community level.

In sum, although education is a pressing issue for San of both genders and all ages, women and girls are still significantly disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts.

A number of organisations are providing support for San education in Namibia (see Chapter 16), but only one of them, namely the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Namibia (FAWENA), has a specific gender focus. Significantly, the lists of learners and students supported by the OPM’s SDP in 2011 and 2012 did not provide information on gender.³⁶ Given the above-mentioned gender-specific problems for San education, a much stronger gender focus is needed to render San women and girls empowered and equal to others in Namibian society.

18.3.8 Gender-based violence

The Committee on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defined gender-based violence as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of her or his gender or sex: “[Gender-based violence] includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, deprivations of liberty, denials of opportunities and services, selective malnourishment of female children, forced prostitution and several harmful traditional practices.”

– FAO 2009: 87

The concept of gender-based violence (GBV) covers a wide range of acts and behaviours; it does not relate to physical abuse alone.³⁷ However, in our discussions with the San, the participants generally referred to GBV in terms of physical assault.

GBV (including domestic violence, which is a subset of GBV – see GR&AP (LAC) 2012: 11) is a serious problem in many San communities today, as in many other Namibian communities (see for example FAO 2009: 88; MoHSS 2008: 243-246; and GR&AP 2012: 63-238). Namibia has passed several pieces of legislation to combat GBV, chief among them the Combating of Rape Act 8 of 2000 and the Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003. But, as noted in the *National*

³⁶ An informal analysis of the names of the learners and students suggested that far fewer than 50% were female, with the highest proportion of supported girls/women in secondary schools and in health training centres studying the (traditionally female) professions of nursing/midwifery. They appeared to be under-represented in other tertiary institutions such as the University of Namibia, the International University of Management and the Institute of Bankers.

³⁷ Namibia’s Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003 also recognises a broad spectrum of forms of ‘domestic violence’, including, inter alia, economic and psychological abuse (GR&AP 2012: 15).

Gender Policy (2010-2012), “effective implementation and consistent enforcement of these laws are lacking” (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) 2010: 30).

The occurrence – or the acceptance – of GBV is a strong indicator of the degree of women’s equality and empowerment, thus this indicator is invoked in a wide array of studies (for example FAO 2009: 87-93; and MoHSS 2008: 243-246).

The degree of acceptance of wife beating – which is high in Namibia – is one of three indicators of women’s empowerment reflected in the *Namibia Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07* report: 35.2% of women and 40.8% of men agreed that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for one of four reasons – i.e. wife burns the food, wife argues with husband, wife neglects the children, and wife refuses to have sexual intercourse with husband) (MoHSS and Macro International 2008: 244, 246). Although we could not apply a similar quantitative methodology in our research, the extent to which domestic violence occurs in San communities can be regarded as an indication of the acceptance of it. At various research sites, discussion participants’ explanations as to why domestic violence occurs in their communities imply that it is widely accepted – or that efforts to combat it have failed. For example, in a gender FDG in Windhoek, the Hai||om women estimated that domestic GBV occurred in half of the households in their community, and in Nꞛa Jaqna Conservancy it was reported that most men had beaten their wives at some time.

By contrast, anthropological literature on San has emphasised the fact that violence against women was rare in the past (Marshall 1976: 176-177), and traditional San communities were reported to be among the few groups worldwide in which domestic violence was absent or very rare. Acts of violence did occasionally occur in traditional San communities, but they were not necessarily gender-based: Lee reported that Ju|’hoan women had been actively involved in fights, and often fought back when attacked; they “often gave as good or better than they got” (Lee 1979: 377).

Since GBV was not common in traditional San communities, what are the reasons for its frequency today?

The FAO baseline study (2009) of Owambo and Caprivan households in Ohangwena, Oshana and Caprivi – including households in two San communities (in Ohangwena and Caprivi) – identified four causal factors for GBV at the level of the individual: alcohol abuse; women’s low levels of economic empowerment; women’s lack of property ownership; and women’s lack of native family support. The contributing factors at community level were peer pressure and the lack of support services for abused women, and at societal level the underlying factors were cultural norms relating to appropriate roles and responsibilities of men and women, and the cultural acceptance of violence (FAO 2009: 88-89). In other studies, men’s feelings of frustration and marginalisation due to unemployment and poverty were found to be causes of domestic violence (see for example Felton and Becker 2001: 58). It was beyond the scope of our study to investigate perceived causes and effects of GBV, as this sensitive topic would require the development of comprehensive research tools for in-depth research, as well as the building of mutual trust relations between San women and men and the researchers. Our FGD with San women in Omusati, for example, revealed that the women were reluctant to discuss the topic openly, even in the absence of their menfolk. Despite the limitations of our research in this regard, some direct causal factors were immediately obvious in the field and in our literature review, and other contributing factors are discernible from an analytical perspective.

Discussion participants across our research sites frequently linked **GBV to alcohol abuse**. In the gender FDG with women at Donkerbos-Sonneblom (Omaheke), for example, all participants agreed that there was a strong correlation between these two phenomena – although they stressed that GBV

was a very rare occurrence in their community. One elderly woman explained that the incidence of GBV had decreased significantly since their move to Donkerbos-Sonneblom because alcohol had been more readily available when they were living on commercial farms. At most research sites, in response to our question of whether alcohol abuse led to violence, discussion participants said that it led not only to violence between men, but also to GBV. However, it should be noted that despite the frequent mention of alcohol abuse in relation to GBV, from an analytical perspective, alcohol abuse is a trigger or contributing factor rather than a root cause.

Apart from alcohol abuse, significant causes of GBV identified by San in the course of our research were jealousy, disagreement about money, and men thinking that their wives are their property – a key underlying cause mentioned by a Hai||om woman in one gender FGD in Windhoek. In this FGD, another Hai||om women said that, “They [the men] believe that beating a woman is to detain a woman.” Elfriede Gaeses conducted interviews with San women on the issue of violence, and her findings formed the basis of her paper titled “Violence against San women” delivered at The First African Indigenous Women’s Conference in Morocco in 1998. The main reasons cited by her interviewees for the violence experienced by San women at the hands of their menfolk were alcohol abuse, men’s jealousy, and men’s fear of losing respect if women were better educated than them (Gaesens 1998: 96).

From an analytical perspective, and based on the empirical evidence presented in this chapter, several key underlying causes of the increased incidence of GBV in San societies can be identified.

Firstly, the relations between men and women have become more hierarchically organised as they have shifted towards **predominant gender ideologies** and prevailing constructions of masculinity and femininity in Namibia. San men, like some other Namibian men, have developed a sense of ownership over their wives, and hence believe that they have a right to punish their wives if they are not sufficiently compliant. For example, in Nꞑa Jaqna Conservancy, male discussion participants said that it is acceptable to beat a woman if she is not fulfilling her duties (e.g. domestic chores), and according to Becker, reporting on the same area, “Changing masculinities may indeed feature strongly among the reasons behind the perceptible trend towards gender-based domestic violence in Tsumkwe West.” (Becker 2003: 12). However, it should be noted that in our discussions at Nꞑa Jaqna, San females strongly and unanimously disagreed with the men on this issue – an indication that women are contesting this shift in gender relationships.

Still, our findings indicate that Becker’s observation is generally valid, not only for Tsumkwe West (Nꞑa Jaqna) but for most of our research sites, if not all of them. The tropes of male strength and ownership of their female partners, and of female ‘weakness’ (i.e. being too weak to hit back), have permeated the gender ideologies of San societies in Namibia – though perhaps to differing degrees in different communities.³⁸ In our research discussions, the perception that women are physically weak came up frequently in various contexts, yet evidence (both past and present) suggests that San women are in fact physically strong: they carry children, heavy bags of veldfood and containers of water, and apparently they are well equipped to hit back should the need arise (Becker 2003: 12).

A second underlying cause is linked to the **extreme marginalisation** of the San, and the frustration experienced by men due to unemployment and poverty – as found also by Felton and Becker for other groups in Namibia, particularly in the marginalised southern regions (2001: 58). The San

³⁸ Again, more in-depth research would be needed to determine whether this shift in ideology is prevalent in all San communities, and whether exposure to other ethnic groups and/or a change of livelihood strategies can affect the degree of adaptation.

are at the bottom of the social ladder within the wider socio-political context of Namibia, and the men, in particular, experience frustration due to their powerlessness. One way for them to express their frustration might be violent or abusive behaviour – frequently exacerbated by alcohol abuse – against those who are even more vulnerable, namely San women, especially if the women are their partners.

Thirdly, changing gender roles combined with severe marginalisation and a loss of land and hunting rights mean that **San men in many areas have lost the opportunity to perform the ‘male role’** – according either to their own traditions or the values that they have adopted from neighbouring and dominant cultures. In many cases, San men are not able to fulfil the role of household provider, and this situation might lead to frustration, alcohol abuse and GBV.³⁹

The high incidence of GBV in San societies can also be attributed to the fact that **the vast majority of San women take no further action** – such as leaving, or asking the police for assistance – when they are physically abused by their male partners or other male community members (|Khaxas and Frank 2012: 10, 14). In one gender FGD in Windhoek, Hai||om women said that women “are used to being beaten” and would not leave their husbands on the grounds that they are physically abusive. It was also said that women are economically dependent on men, thus a woman would be reluctant to go to the police to open a case against a man on whom she and her family members rely for financial or other support. This is despite the fact that – as our study has shown – the reality of the situation is often more complex. First of all, San men have limited opportunities to earn money, and even when they do so, the income is not always used to meet household needs. Secondly, the Old Age Pension, which is allocated to men and women alike, is often the most important income in a San household. Thirdly, women have extended social networks (mainly female) on which they can rely in times of need. Thus to us it seems that San women’s belief that they are economically dependent on their partners is a further indication of the degree to which a dominant gender ideology has invaded San communities.

Although not pertaining only to GBV, two important points about seeking legal support must be noted. Firstly, there is a lack of knowledge in San communities about what legal steps can be taken in cases of GBV (e.g. getting a protection order), and many San are uninformed or misinformed about what constitutes an illegal act of GBV in the first place. For example, a young male discussion participant in Nṙa Jaqna Conservancy said that it was legal for a man to beat his wife there (see also |Khaxas and Frank 2012: 6; and GR&AP 2006: 54). Secondly, even in situations where women have known their rights and have sought help, the police were not necessarily supportive. At many of our research sites (and in other contexts), it was reported that the police did not take the necessary actions against perpetrators of GBV, and in many places it was said that the police rarely interfere in cases of domestic violence as they regard this as an issue that should remain within the private sphere (see for example Feal 2011: 17; and GR&AP 2006: 54).

In summary, the increase of GBV in San communities can be ascribed to a combination of several issues which are interrelated: the uncomfortable economic position in which men find themselves, and the resulting feelings of powerlessness and frustration that they experience; a cultural shift

³⁹ It should be noted that domestic violence also occurred on commercial farms where San men, being farmworkers, were still able to fulfil their role as breadwinner. Sylvain reported that domestic violence on the commercial farms in Omaheke in the 1990s was associated mostly with a husband’s drinking and a wife’s ‘disobedient’ behaviour. For example, a San husband might become violent if his wife resisted his plans to quit his job and leave the farm – a move which San women often opposed because leaving the farm usually resulted in a loss of income and a dramatic decline in the family’s standard of living (Sylvain 2004: 11).

towards the gender ideologies of dominant groups that view women as subordinate to (and ideally under the control of) men; San women's lack of awareness of their human rights and their capacity or power to take the necessary legal action; and a lack of action on the part of the police (see also Sylvain 2010: 99-102).

Our data and analysis illustrate that the primary causes of GBV among the San differ somewhat to those identified in the FAO baseline study (2009). As already discussed in this chapter, San men and women tend to control their resources individually, thus women are not significantly economically disempowered in comparison to their male counterparts, and, at least in theory, San women are allowed to own property such as land and livestock. Furthermore, women rely heavily on (female) family networks for support. Therefore, the lack of female economic empowerment, property ownership and family support identified in the FAO baseline study as causal factors in fact play only a limited role in San communities.

Men of other ethnic backgrounds also frequently commit acts of violence against San women (see GR&AP 2006: 54; and Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2008: 7). In the Namibian San Council's submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples during his visit in September 2012, the rape and sexual abuse of San women by non-San men was mentioned as a serious concern, as was the lack of a police response (Nakuta 2012: 12). Violence perpetrated by non-San men against San women is linked to the beliefs that the San are collectively inferior and that San women are the weakest members of this community and thus are easily abused (Gaeses 1998: 92-98). Sylvain provided further details on the specific vulnerability of San women to sexual abuse at the hands of non-San men, based on her research in Epako (Gobabis, Omaheke Region): "San women are particularly vulnerable because of a widespread belief that 'Bushmen' women are highly promiscuous and generally sexually available – when they are assaulted, they don't 'feel' raped." (Sylvain 2004: 12) Here again it becomes evident that San women are confronted with intersectional discrimination and mutually reinforcing ethnic, class and gender inequalities (Sylvain 2010: 89).

18.3.9 Participation in decision making and representation

Box 18.1: Gender in Hai||om society

Q: What are the main challenges of Hai||om women compared to Hai||om men?

A: According to tradition the women are not outspoken. They don't decide on big issues. They are not allowed to raise their opinions. The men are the ones who make the decisions.

A: They are also not allowed to go out and look for jobs. They are supposed to take care of the kids because the men are the ones to provide.

Q: Is that happening nowadays?

A: We are now living in the 21st century and things are beginning to change. We try to go out and look for work. In the deep villages the women are still following that because they are illiterate and they do not know if they have rights. In towns such as Outjo and Tsumeb, women are looking for jobs because they want to provide for their families.

– Excerpt from gender FGD in Windhoek

The FGD excerpt above exemplifies some of the critical issues as regards the participation of San females in decision making. Firstly, it illustrates the extent to which San women have internalised hegemonic ideologies of women's subordination to men – ideologies which reportedly were not prevalent in San hunter-gatherer societies historically. Secondly, it shows that notions of 'tradition' or culture – even if these have emerged only recently in respect of San perceptions of gender roles

– underpin San women’s inability to participate equally in decision making. Thirdly, San women’s awareness of their human rights is associated with education – in most cases a lack of education.

Although this is the overarching discourse that emerged from our research, it is worth looking in more detail at the different levels of decision making: household, community, local, regional and national.

Household level: No consistent picture emerged in the course of our research, because female participation in decision making varies both between and within communities, and apparently depends mainly on individual arrangements between family members. Although an elderly male (when present) is considered to be the head of the household, it is often the case that a husband and wife take joint decisions, e.g. on spending household income (see also FAO 2009: 83-84). Also, as a high number of San households are headed by females, decisions to be made at household level revert to female heads. Furthermore, as most resources (e.g. income from piecework, pension money and livestock) are deemed to be owned individually in San communities, the owner (either male or female) has final say in decisions about the use of those resources.

Community level: The picture of female decision making at this level is more consistent than at household level. Felton and Becker stated that, “Community facilitators and trainers, development workers and researchers alike regularly report on their frustrations when trying to involve women in decision-making in public forums.” (Felton and Becker 2001: 77) By and large, our field research has confirmed this (see also section 1.2.8, page 11): at most sites, the women sat separately from the men, and tended to participate in the discussions much less than men (e.g. at Skoonheid Resettlement Project, all sites in Kavango and Ohangwena, and at Omega I in the BNP). On the other hand, there were sites where the women sat separately from the men, but actively participated in the discussions (e.g. in Outjo in Kunene Region, and Corridors 13 and 17-b in Omaheke). Only at the sites in Omusati Region did the women and men sit together and participate equally. Our observations lead us to conclude that San women generally need to have even more self-esteem than their male counterparts before they feel free to be outspoken in community-level discussions. Factors constraining women’s participation in community-level discussions might be the language barrier and the belief that women in general are less familiar with the ‘outside world’. The presence of outsiders in such meetings is likely to be an additional constraining factor (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 77).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in our field research there were occasions when individual San women were very outspoken and very eloquent in voicing their opinions (e.g. in Mushashane in the BNP, Makaravan in Caprivi, Outjo and N’fa Jaqna Conservancy). Factors contributing to their more active participation might include personal characteristics (above all, self-confidence), their role or position in the community (e.g. sister of the headman, community facilitator, kindergarten teacher, TA councillor or committee member), and their level of education and proficiency in English or Afrikaans. Another factor favouring the participation of San women at community level is long-term exposure to, or involvement with, NGOs that make efforts to actively involve women in community meetings. Some women have also received training through these NGOs (e.g. WIMSA), which may have increased their self-confidence and their capacity to speak up. For example, a change in the participation of young and middle-aged women in local leadership and the management of activities in the resettlement projects in Omaheke has been observed in recent years as a result of capacity-building efforts there: increasingly, women in these projects have ensured that their concerns are heard in community meetings.

⁴⁰ Although San women are mostly hesitant to speak as openly as the men in community meetings, more research would be needed to determine the extent to which they participate in informal discussions before or after these meetings, and thereby have their voices heard and considered indirectly (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 77).

Local committees: San women are generally well represented in farm management development committees (FMDCs) and conservancy committees (established, in many cases, with the assistance of NGOs). Both of the current elected chairpersons of Nyae Nyae and Nǃa Jaqna Conservancies are women, neither of whom was new to positions of authority. The Nyae Nyae chairperson, Xoa||an |Ai!ae, was formerly the coordinator of the Nyae Nyae Craft Project for several years, and served as a conservancy board member for the two years prior to her election as chairperson. The Nǃa Jaqna chairperson, Sara Sungu, is a senior councillor in the !Xun Traditional Authority, and has been active in community matters for many years (Diez 2011: 1).

Local and regional government structures: San generally are very under-represented in bodies such as water point committees (WPCs), village development committees (VDCs), constituency development committees (CDCs) and regional development coordinating committees (RDCCs), and overall, the participation of San women is even more limited than that of San men – the exception being the only San person in Namibia currently holding the position of regional councillor, namely Fransina Ghauz, a Ju|’hoan woman who represents Tsumkwe Constituency in Otjozondjupa Region.

Traditional authorities (TAs): One of the five recognised San chiefs is a woman, namely Chief Sofia Jacob of the TA representing the !Xoon, Naro and ‘N|oha in Omaheke Region. Not surprisingly, in her area women were observed to be more outspoken than at most of our other research sites, which is probably an indication that the chief serves as a role model for other women. In each of the recognised San TAs, women are included in the TA structure, and five of the 14 members of the **Namibian San Council** are women.

Several issues should be stressed here with regard to the participation and representation of San women:

- a) In all San groups in Namibia, women – at least one, and often more than one – play an important role in both formal and informal leadership, through their positions as village leaders or in TA structures, or through their positions with community-based organisations and national NGOs.
- b) A gender balance in representative structures does not automatically lead to more extensive integration of gender issues in decision-making processes. Women in leadership positions – and this is a widespread phenomenon, not one that is unique to San communities – at times tend to adjust themselves to the dominant ethos without trying to change its structures and underlying values.
- c) San women in leadership positions sometimes face obstacles that their own communities create, because nowadays (unlike in the past), San males and females alike find it difficult to accept women in leadership positions. This is linked to the dominant constructions of gender relations which the San have adopted to varying degrees.

“It is challenging in our culture for a woman to lead men. We [women] are known to be people who should be under men and obey mainly what men say. In this case I find myself leading and making decisions for men, which is not accepted easily by many [men and women]. Some women perceive my personality to be unusual in our culture. A few more are beginning to accept female decision making after gender training and such, but many still seem to be finding it difficult to be led by a woman.”

– Sara Sungu, chairperson of Nǃa Jaqna Conservancy, quoted in Diez 2011: 1

18.4 Conclusions

Livelihood strategies and the division of labour in San communities

Subsistence patterns and the gendered division of labour in Namibian San communities have changed tremendously over the last century. Connected to this, San communities have incorporated many of the aspects of the patriarchal gender ideology that is dominant in most other communities in Namibia, where the men are (by and large) seen as the family providers and as being responsible for the productive tasks, while the women are seen as being responsible for most of the reproductive work in the domestic sphere. However, the degree of change in subsistence patterns, and the extent of the adoption of the patriarchal gender ideology have differed from one San community to the next; they vary considerably within and between regions, according to each community's exposure to neighbouring groups and the forms of change in their subsistence patterns.

Before Independence, San men were largely able to fulfil their role as major contributors to the household's income and/or food supply – even though the income was very meagre at times – especially relative to other household members. Those who were living on what is now communal land next to other ethnic groups (e.g. the !Xun and Hai||om in former Owamboland, and the Ju|'hoansi and !Xoon in what is now Omaheke Region) could still make a significant contribution to the household's income and/or food supply through hunting and doing piecework for their neighbours, and those living in commercial farming areas were able to undertake labour on the farms (Hai||om, !Xun, Ju|'hoansi, !Xoon). Khwe men were employed in mines in South Africa, and some San men (mainly !Xun and Khwe) were employed by the SADF.

"Before Independence women used to stay at home, and the men were responsible for income and food. However, since Independence, during 'Namibia time', both men and women need to work in order to support the household, but there is hardly any work for them."

– Female discussion participant at Blouberg Resettlement Farm, Omaheke Region

The quote above refers to the situation of the San in communities that formerly lived on commercial farms. The circumstances were different in areas where wage labour did not constitute the chief source of household income, and where veldfood gathering, and to a lesser extent subsistence agriculture, were central livelihood strategies (e.g. in specific areas in Caprivi, Kavango, Ohangwena and Omusati). In those areas before Independence, women did not stay at home but rather took an active part in productive work.

After Independence, the opportunities to function as provider decreased tremendously for San men: work on commercial farms became increasingly scarce because the farmers could no longer afford to employ as many workers once the new labour legislation was introduced; and San employment in the SADF of course collapsed at Independence when the SADF withdrew from Namibia. In addition, the chance to hunt occasionally in order to contribute to the household's food supply was removed by the increasing need for grazing for livestock owned by neighbouring groups, and this was aggravated by the fact that well-off communal farmers erected (illegal) fences on the land.

Today, Old Age Pensions are often the main source of income for entire households, thus elderly men and women become the main 'breadwinners' in the family. Although the pension amount does not suffice to sustain an entire household (unless it is a very small one, perhaps), compared to piecework the pension is at least a more regular source of income and often a more lucrative one.

Access to, and control over, resources, and inheritance patterns

Compared to most other Namibian communities, the San have very limited access to resources and control over the resources to which they have access (e.g. land, livestock and physical assets). However, San women are not as clearly disadvantaged in relation to their male counterparts as are the women of other Namibian communities where assets are controlled mainly by men (LeBeau et al. 2004). This is because many resources are controlled individually, and San widows (and their children) tend to inherit the biggest portion of their deceased husbands' property (which in most cases is very limited). Nevertheless, stakeholders aiming to increase San access to, and control over, resources should focus more strongly on gender, as efforts to improve resource availability for the San run the risk of further reinforcing internal gender stratification in San communities.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV), often triggered by alcohol abuse, is a major problem in most San communities. Shifting gender roles has undoubtedly added to the social disintegration experienced by the San in Namibia, and young men in particular find it difficult to play any significant role as contributors to their households' income and/or food supply because employment opportunities for them are so scarce in independent Namibia – although this is linked to the overall scarcity of employment opportunities as well as low education levels among the San, both male and female. As repeatedly noted throughout this report, job applicants from other ethnic groups tend to get preferential treatment due to widely held stereotypical notions about the San (e.g. that they are lazy, leave jobs very readily, and are prone to alcohol abuse). Hence the role that young men played as major provider of food/income has diminished, whereas young women can still fulfil their familiar reproductive responsibilities (household tasks and giving birth) assigned to them in the predominant gender ideology. Though not the only factor, this vacuum in respect of young men's productive activities has certainly increased the level of alcohol abuse and GBV among the San. It might also play a role in intergenerational conflicts, i.e. elders (e.g. in Omaheke) complain that young men and women have no interest in taking part in agricultural activities and are dependent on their elders – existing only by “eating their food”.

The fact that San women take no further action when they suffer acts of GBV perpetuates the problem. Combating GBV in San communities thus requires a multi-layered approach that takes into account the situations of both the perpetrators and the victims.

Education

The completion of formal education is a challenge for San boys and San girls. However, girls are disadvantaged relative to boys. Firstly, girls in rural areas risk sexual harassment when walking long distances to school, and when staying in hostels or with host families. Secondly, girls need more financial resources to buy necessary toiletries and sanitary items. Thirdly, teenage pregnancy and early marriage result in higher dropout rates among girls. Fourthly, as girls tend to have lower self-esteem than boys, they are more affected by bullying and discriminatory behaviour in school, and consequently are more likely to drop out of school.

Health

As with education, San women are clearly in a more vulnerable position than San men. Firstly, they are not only responsible for their own health, but also tend to be the ones who see to the health needs of the children and other family members. Secondly, access to contraception services

is limited, and this poses additional health risks for women and especially teenagers, not to mention the socio-economic implications for their lives. Thirdly, all the issues around accessing healthcare facilities and trained personnel during pregnancy and childbirth place San women at a higher risk of complications and emergencies in this reproductive period of their lives. Fourthly, the women comprise a highly vulnerable group in terms of exposure to HIV infection, as some of them engage in exploitative sexual relationships with non-San men who are in a better economic position than themselves.

Participation and representation

With regard to the participation and representation of San women, in traditional hunter-gatherer societies women could and did occupy leadership positions, but during the colonial period, San women came to be excluded from decision-making processes at higher levels (i.e. outside their households) to varying degrees, and it became increasingly difficult for them to attain leadership positions. Currently there are a number of outspoken San women in leadership positions; Namibia's progressive gender policy (though not sufficiently implemented), the engagement of NGOs that strive for gender balance, and relatively higher levels of education in recent cohorts of San girls (coupled with an attendant increase in self-confidence), have proved to be essential in this regard. However, some of the women in leadership positions still experience alienation within their own communities, because female leadership is not yet socially acceptable.

External support

Stakeholders working with San communities are generally gender-sensitive and make efforts to promote gender equality in accordance with international and national legal instruments and guidelines – despite these contradicting many customary belief systems and practices in Namibia. For example, organisations:

- raise awareness on human rights and women's rights, and provide leadership training for women (e.g. the Legal Assistance Centre and the Women's Leadership Centre respectively);
- support capacity building and training for women in, for example, local leadership and community organisation (e.g. WIMSA and DRFN); and
- implement income-generating projects targeting women (e.g. the OPM, and the Omba Arts Trust in cooperation with IRDNC, the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia and the Habitafrica Foundation).

Most of these organisations, if not all of them, try to promote levels of female representation in established representative structures that are necessary in the development context for the successful implementation of projects (see also Felton and Becker 2001: 84). Although some headway has been made in terms of San women's empowerment and gender equality, evidence of a full commitment to gender mainstreaming is still lacking in many of these projects. For example, when planning and implementing projects, more attention has to be given to the logistical demands placed on women in representative or management roles who are already responsible for households, childcare, caring for the sick, and (sometimes) income generation. A stronger focus on the special educational and health needs of San women should also be prioritised.

Although some of the gender-related problems that San women face today are the same as those faced by women of other ethnic groups in Namibia, often the situation of San women is much worse due to the multidimensional inequality that they experience, i.e. in terms of gender, class and ethnicity.

18.5 Recommendations

The focus on women often tends to be the natural first step towards addressing gender inequalities. However, our study findings strongly suggest that what is needed is a holistic approach that targets all members of individual San communities as well as Namibian society generally and its stakeholders and office-bearers in particular. An effort to mainstream a gender perspective in all development initiatives targeting the San is urgently called for as well: it seems as if stakeholders, faced with the extreme poverty of San communities, tend to ignore the gender perspective as a mainstreaming methodology in their efforts to improve the overall livelihoods of San communities. This is not to say that their endeavours are wholly gender blind; they might try to encourage female participation in public meetings or raise awareness among women about their human rights, for example, but then they fail to apply the same approach in all of their initiatives (e.g. in relation to animal husbandry and land allocation). By failing to implement gender mainstreaming thoroughly, they risk furthering the stratification along gender lines in these communities.

First of all, and as a long-term strategy, it is necessary to challenge the dominant gender ideology's ingrained conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity, and the resultant gendered division of labour – of course this is as relevant for the whole of Namibia as it is for San specifically. Although this process has been underway in Namibia since Independence, mainly effected through law reform and awareness-raising campaigns, the progress to date is slow – which is not surprising given the pervasiveness of such deeply entrenched internalised attitudes.

In the *Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Namibia*,⁴¹ the Committee expressed its “concern about the persistence of strong patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society ...” and called upon this State Party “to take measures to bring about change in the widely accepted stereotypical roles of men and women”. Further, “Such efforts should include comprehensive awareness-raising and educational campaigns that address women and men and girls and boys, with a view to eliminating the stereotypes associated with traditional gender roles in the family and in society, in accordance with articles 2(f) and 5(a) of the Convention.” (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2007: 3).

The efforts to run awareness-raising and educational campaigns in San communities will have to be innovative and creative. Conventional workshops on human rights and related issues will certainly not suffice to achieve a fundamental change in the attitudes and convictions that have been passed down through generations. Radio programmes in San languages and community theatre events, and techniques such as role-plays, are all communication methods that could be investigated with a view to expanding the repertoire of methods used. As with all development initiatives, long-term involvement with the communities, and effective monitoring and evaluation of successes and failures, will be required to achieve a sustainable change.

Although fundamental and wholesale change is the ultimate goal of all efforts to address gender inequality in its various manifestations – change that would eventually reveal itself through the altered gender relationships in all of Namibia's communities – in the meantime, the stratifications and differentiations in San communities require specific attention in project design and human rights advocacy (see also Becker 2003: 22). Gender mainstreaming therefore has to be integrated into all kinds of San support initiatives.

⁴¹ Namibia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992.

In particular, we recommend the following:

- Consider San women's multiple burdens (domestic work, childcare, income generation, and perhaps representative duties) when planning projects/activities that make further demands on their time (e.g. income-generating projects, adult education and representative positions).
- Investigate the potential for income-generating activities that utilise the environmental knowledge of (elderly) San women.
- Explore and support San women's social networks with a view to assisting those women who wish to engage in income-generating activities, educational activities or representative roles.
- Pay special attention to young San men while planning and implementing livelihood projects, so as to accord them meaningful roles – which do not challenge too directly their notions of masculinity – in the current domestic division of labour.
- At the same time, reflect on and sensitise San to gender convictions at local level. Trainings and communication on gender sensitivity (by means of community theatre, radio programmes etc.) should accompany any development effort. The trainings should involve San women, men, girls and boys, and should help them to understand and reflect on their respective perceptions of gender relations, the gendered division of labour and the control of community resources. These initiatives should also include the San elders, and should trigger discussion of traditional San gender roles and of evidence in the historical and anthropological literature, so as to generate an evaluation of the perceived differences between former and current gender relations.
- Implement initiatives to familiarise communities with the international and national guidelines and legal instruments that underpin women's rights and human rights generally. In this regard, the training of San women as community mobilisers or (specialised) paralegals is recommended.
- Continue to promote gender balance in San representative structures, and monitor the potential negative effects of women's involvement on the women themselves, including the extra burdens (in addition to reproductive work etc.) placed on them in terms of time and resources, and the challenges they might face from male community members.
- Target San women through specific programmes in order to increase their self-confidence and thereby enable them to overcome their resistance to public speaking and advocating. Strongly support the establishment of San women's organisations – in consultation with San women and involving all San communities – and establish linkages between San women and other indigenous women around the world within the international indigenous women's movement. San women's organisations should also network with other women's organisations in Namibia.
- Pay special attention to San girls in educational programmes, with the aim of addressing the factors that contribute to their high dropout rates (early pregnancy, early marriage, involvement in transactional sex etc.).
- Ensure that the Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy is implemented in San communities.
- Target San women in health education outreach programmes, and integrate their special needs into health programmes.
- Take further action to reduce the high level of gender-based violence that San women face at the hands of both San and non-San men. Regarding the most extreme form of GBV, i.e. rape, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has recommended that Namibia “adopt all necessary measures to ensure prompt, thorough and independent investigations into all allegations of rape against San women ... increase its efforts aimed at combating prejudices against the San and ... promote tolerance and foster intercultural dialogue among the different ethnic groups of Namibia.” (UN Committee on CERD 2008: 7). This recommendation should be extended to encompass all forms of GBV.

In sum, while this study has shown that coordinated and systematic efforts are needed to eradicate extreme poverty of San communities (including men, women and children), specific attention must be paid to gender issues so as to avoid a feminisation of (San) poverty.