

Chapter 8

Omusati Region

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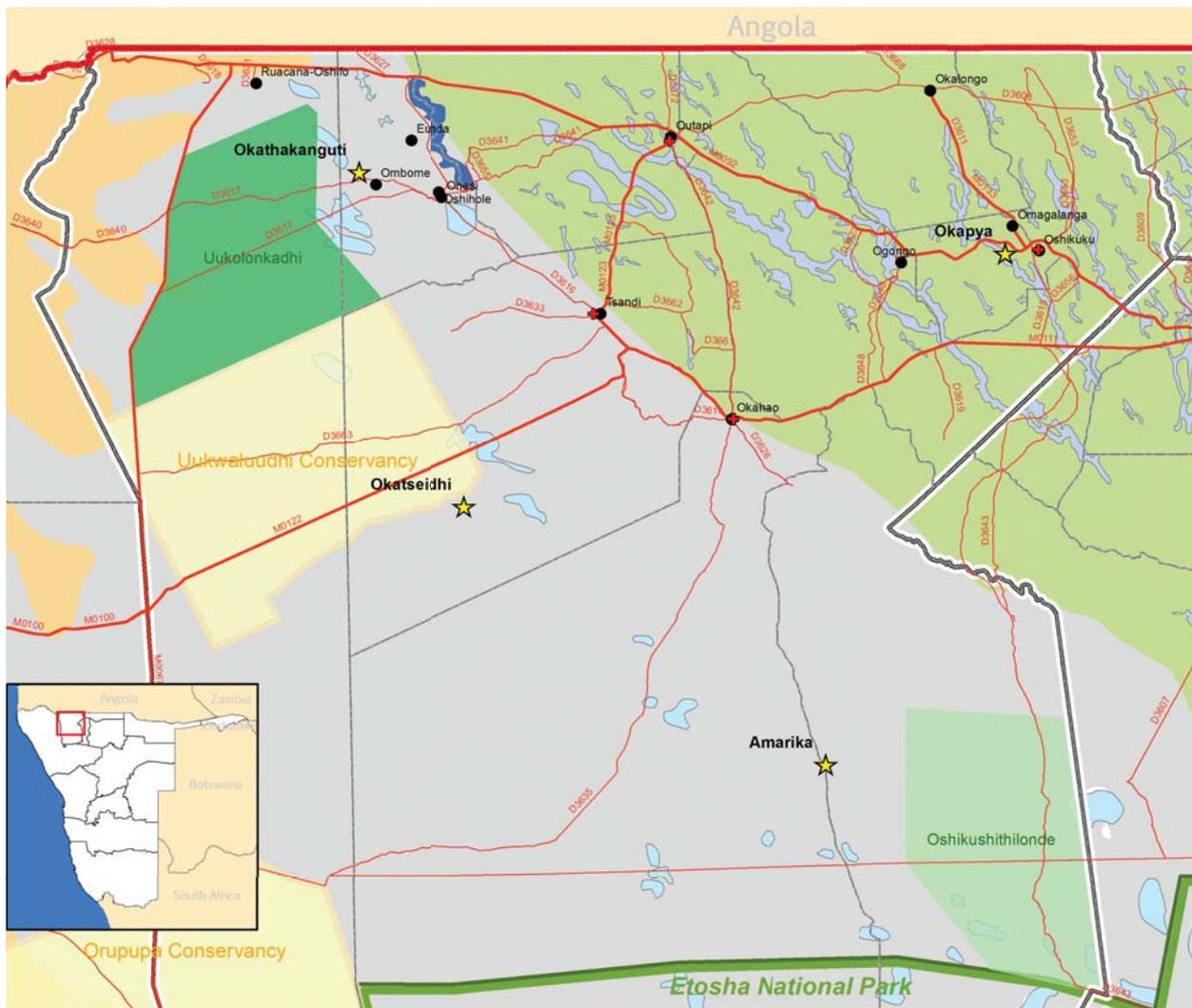


8.1 General background

Omusati Region is situated in the north-western part of Namibia, bordered by Angola to the north, Kunene Region to the west and south, and Oshana and Ohangwena Regions to the east. The natural landscape is primarily made up of sand dunes, mopane trees, makalani palms, fig trees and marula trees. The climate of Omusati Region is similar to that of the three north-central regions of Namibia (Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto), with very hot summers and cool to warm winters.

Omusati Region comprises 12 administrative and political constituencies, Outapi being the regional capital. The region encompasses four main towns (Outapi, Okahao, Oshikuku and Ruacana), four main settlements (Ogongo, Okalongo, Onesi and Tsandi), four settlements in development (Elim, Etayi, Onawa, Otamanzi), and nine traditional authorities (Okalongo, Omabalantu, Ongandjera, Otjikaoko, Oukwanyama, Uukolonkadhi, Uukwaluudhi, Uukwambi and Vita Royal House).

Omusati Region and the research sites



Legend

- ★ Research Site
- Other Location
- ⛑ Hospital
- Trunk Road
- Main Road
- Other Road
- ▭ National Border
- ▭ Regional Border
- ▭ Constituency Border
- Conservancy
- Registered Community Forest
- Emerging Community Forest
- National Park
- Dam
- Lake
- Oshana
- Pan
- Swamp
- Cuvelai System
- Kalahari Sandveld
- Karstveld

0 5 10 20 30 40 50 Kilometres

Source: LAC, MLR and NSA.
Map design: Florian Fennert



A member of the research team with San boys in Omusati Region

Omusati's population of 240 900 is the third largest regional population in Namibia, preceded by those of Khomas and Ohangwena (341 000 and 242 700 respectively). Almost the entire region (94%) comprises rural communal areas, complemented by four towns, four main settlements and several conservancies. The population density is very high: 9.1 persons per km² compared with the national population density of 2.6 persons per km². The average household size in Ohangwena Region was 5.2 persons in 2011 (down from 5.9 in 2001), but this is still much higher than the national average household size of 4.4 persons. However, many Omusati households can have as many as 10 or more members, based on the extended family structure culturally practised in the region. Most households (55% compared to 62% in 2001) are headed by females (Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) 2013: 8-18).

The main economic activities in the region are agriculture in the form of rain-fed crop farming, irrigated crop-farming projects (Ebandulo and Etunda projects), livestock farming and freshwater fish farming. For subsistence, residents mostly engage in communal agricultural production, and the most common source of income is wages and salaries (25% of all income sources). Formal employment opportunities are limited to towns and some other major settlements. Informal employment opportunities are available in rural areas in the form of hiring of labour for, inter alia, cultivating fields, herding livestock, collecting water, cleaning houses, washing clothes, collecting firewood, collecting thatching grass and erecting fences.

Omusati is one of the five poorest regions in Namibia. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) statistics for 2001, of Namibia's 13 regions, Omusati had the fourth worst life expectancy at birth, the sixth worst literacy rate and the third lowest annual average per capita income (Levine 2007: 10). Omusati, along with Kavango and Oshikoto Regions, had the highest Human Poverty Index (HPI) (45) of the 13 regions (Levine 2007: 11).

Almost all Omusati residents (96.1%) speak Oshiwambo, followed by those who speak Otjiherero (2.8%), English (0.5%), Lozi (0.1%), Rukwangali (0.1%), other European languages (0.1%), other African languages (0.1%), Tswana (0.1%) and German (0.1%). The NSA *Population and Housing Census Basic Report* further noted that 0% of the region's households spoke a San language (NSA 2013: 171). All San at the four sites visited for this study were fully conversant in Oshiwambo dialects, depending on where they lived.

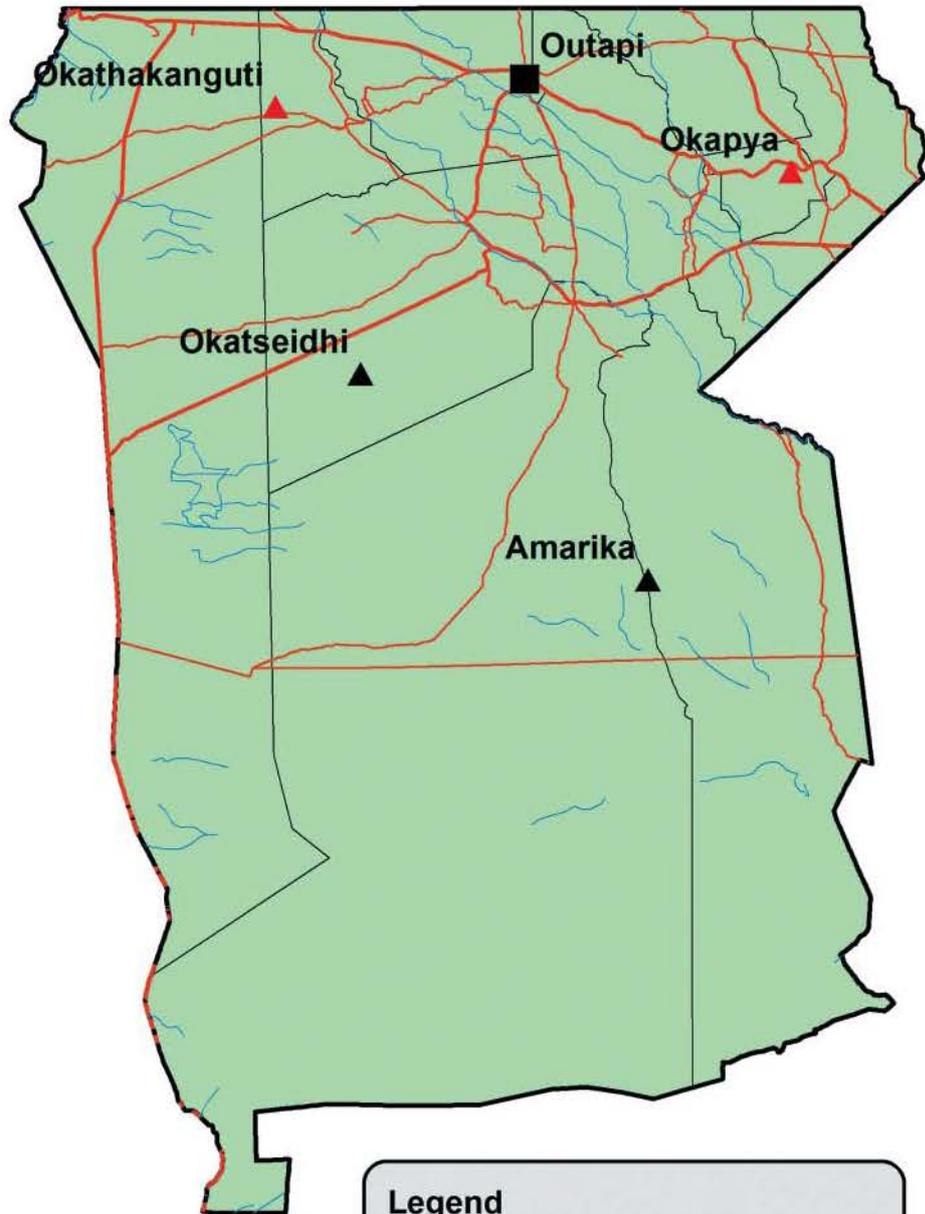
8.2 The San in Omusati Region

Mosimane and Mbandi (2009: 4) noted that, "Due to powerlessness, voicelessness and lack of organisation, the San are not visible and that creates the impression that there are no San in the Omusati Region." Determining the San population in Omusati is extremely difficult because:

- the San are scattered across the region;
- they do not use San names any longer;
- their main language at home is no longer a San dialect and thus they are not counted in the census as a San group; and
- they are not registered as San for regional development purposes.

The San in Omusati Region have adopted Owambo cultures and lifestyles to such an extent that their homesteads, farming methods and cultural practices are similar to those of the Owambo and their overall lifestyle has taken a form similar to that of the Owambo communities in which they live. However, insofar as they retain characteristics of a discrete group known as *Kwangara* – they are the poorest population group in the region.

Research sites in Omusati Region



Legend

- Outapi
- ▲ research site
- ▲ (red) research sites funded through GIZ grant
- (blue) river
- (thick red) main road
- (thin red) district road
- (grey) constituencies boundary
- (black) regional boundary



Source: Ministry of Lands and Resettlement and Legal Assistance Centre

8.3 Research sites in Omusati Region

This section of the report introduces the four participating sites: Okatseidhi, Amarika, Okathakanguti and Okapya. It provides a summary of the location, population, history and infrastructure for each site. These sites were purposefully selected on the basis of certain criteria, as set out in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Main characteristics of the Omusati research sites

Research sites	Urban/rural status	Land tenure	Language group	Population status (numerical)	Institutional support	
					GRN	NGOs
Amarika	Rural (extremely remote)	Communal village	Oshiwambo dialect	Majority	Water desalination plant	Water desalination plant
Okatseidhi	Rural (somewhat remote)	Communal village	Oshiwambo dialect	Minority	Drought relief	Health
Okathakanguti	Rural (somewhat remote)	Communal village	Oshiwambo dialect	Minority	Drought relief	Health
Okapya	Rural (close to peri-urban area)	Communal village	Oshiwambo dialect	Minority	Drought relief	Health

8.3.1 Okatseidhi

Okatseidhi is located in Tsandi Constituency. The village is just over 7 km from the new tarred road between the main Okahao-Tsandi road and Omakange, and about 5 km east of the turnoff. There were more than 300 homesteads in Okatseidhi at the time of our survey there; only around 30 being San households and all the others Uukwaludhi. The total population of San was 185, consisting of 14 male-headed households and 15 female-headed households. Numbers of orphans were counted by discussion participants as 27 across 11 San households.



A traditional fence around San homesteads in Okatseidhi village

San discussion participants indicated that San were the original inhabitants of this area. They did not remember when their ancestors first moved to this area, but they noted that they were all born on this land. They indicated that they lived here before the war for Namibia's independence. One participant said, "Our grandparents have lived and died in this village." Before the war for Namibia's independence, the Uukwaludhi King requested land from the San living in the areas, but most Uukwaludhi people moved into the area only after Independence. A male participant said, "Once they [the Uukwaludhi people] came here, they took over the land."

As indicated earlier, the homesteads of the San were similar to those of the Uukwaludhi people, with a traditional fence around the agricultural fields and houses. In general, San homesteads in Omusati were very different from the *omupondos*¹ found in Ohangwena Region, as San homesteads in Omusati had similar structures and layouts to those of Owambo homesteads.

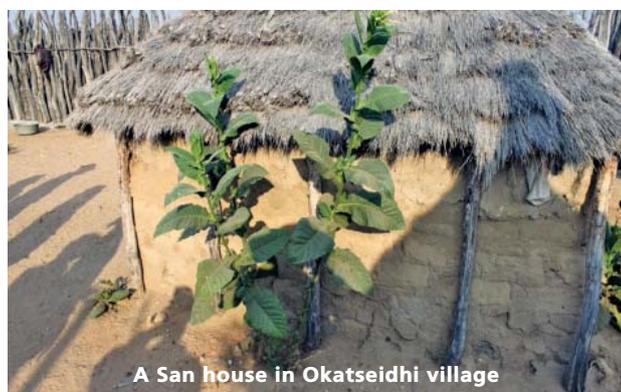
We found the following infrastructure within the village boundaries:

- a primary school (Grades 1-5);
- a clinic, with one nurse;
- a police station (only a tent) with six police officers;
- one water tank and two taps (NamWater);
- a church;
- a cemetery;
- several shebeens – some owned by San people;
- two community meeting places – one for the community and one for SWAPO meetings; and
- a two-track road connecting the village with the main tarred road.

As water must be paid for, and most San in the village could not afford to pay for it, the water infrastructure (tank and taps) was utilised mostly by Uukwaludhi residents, and only a few San residents, i.e. recipients of pension funds (Old Age Pension and War Veteran Pension). San who could not pay had two alternatives: borrowing the water cards of those who could pay, or collecting water from one of the several open wells which had been dug in the village.

The village did not have electricity, nor a cellphone network, although cellphone reception was sometimes available at one specific place close to the clinic. The lack of a cellphone network was a serious concern, especially in cases when someone needed urgent medical attention.

Compared with many other remote villages in Omusati, Okatseidhi had better access to services and resources, i.e. those related to health, education, pension payments, water, security and land.



A San house in Okatseidhi village



One spot in Okatseidhi had part-time cellphone reception.

¹ San houses made out of sticks and various other materials (blankets, plastic, boxes, etc.).

8.3.2 Amarika

Amarika is an extremely remote village (around 50 km from the main tarred road) south of the town of Okahao in Otamanzi Constituency, Omusati, and approximately 5 km north of the northern border of Etosha National Park.

Currently, Amarika is the home of a mixed group of people who are collectively called Ovakwakuti, meaning ‘the people from the bush of Amarika’. They are the offspring of mixed marriages and relationships, mainly between Owambo and San persons, but also between Herero and San as well as Nama/Damara and San. There were approximately 75 households in Amarika, most of which were Ovakwakuti households and some of which were Ongandjera households.

The San were the original inhabitants of this area. According to discussion participants and the oral history provided by an elderly San woman, the first person who came to this area a long time ago was a San man known as Amarika, from whom the village took its name. He was the first person to find water at the site, and the first in the area to dig an open well – by means of a special digging procedure using a gemsbok horn. San people (perhaps led by Amarika) moved to what is now known as Amarika village, possibly in the mid-1900s.² Participants noted that their forefathers moved upwards from the area now known as Etosha National Park, and that they were the first people to settle at Amarika, where they found suitable water for their animals and could access veldfood. The Ongandjera, Herero and Nama/Damara people moved in afterwards. The participants were not sure when the Herero and Nama/Damara moved in, but they were certain that the Ongandjera moved in first and established a cattle post. After the latter was established, many people moved in over time.

The homesteads of the Ovakwakuti residents were similar to those of the Ongandjera, with a traditional fence around the agricultural fields and houses. Most Ovakwakuti households had their own agricultural fields with traditional fences made of poles and sticks.

The village had the following infrastructure:

- a clinic with one nurse;
- a primary school from Grades 1-4;
- a church – of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) – with a female Ovakwakuti pastor;
- a cemetery with no fence;
- a water desalination plant, sponsored by Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW – a German development partner), with the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) serving as the community facilitation consultancy;
- hand-dug open wells, from which cattle and other farm animals could drink – the water level seemingly being very high in this area where there were over 60 hand-dug wells;
- a two-track road connecting the village with the main tarred road; and
- veterinary services.



² It was difficult for the participants to determine the time, but some said it might have been during the time of what they referred to as “the Hitler war”.

One borehole filled several tanks at the desalination plant with clean drinking water for human consumption. At the plant there were two taps for water collection. Participants noted that diarrhoea among children decreased after the plant was established. Water collected from the plant cost 25 cents per 25-litre container. The payment was made to one of the two caretakers responsible for the monitoring of plant operations.

The following infrastructure was unavailable in Amarika: a cellphone network; a police station; and electricity.

8.3.3 Okathakanguti

Okathakanguti village is located in Onesi Constituency, some 12 km west of Onesi settlement. Okathakanguti is an Oshiwambo name meaning ‘a small pond where doves come to drink water’.

Okathakanguti is a fairly small community in terms of population size. The total population was 173 residents, living in 30 households, seven of which were San households (i.e. about 20% of all households) with a total population of 35 San, thus an average household size of five. The San participants estimated that there were 23 non-San households (Uukolonkadhi, Uukwambi and Kwanyama), with an approximate total population of 138 and an average household size of six.

According to the participants’ oral narrations, the first San in the area lived in Oshihole village in the greater Onesi settlement area. As people from other ethnic groups (mainly Owambo) moved closer, the San moved westwards to Ombome B village. This movement is likely to have taken place before the war for Namibia’s independence. Circa 1998, the adult and married offspring of the Ombome B San settlers moved away from their parents to Okathakanguti village to find more space for their households and to cultivate fields for their crops – however it should be noted that people moved to Okathakanguti village at different times and not en masse. The elderly people could remember that when they moved to Ombome B there was no one living in the Okathakanguti area. Therefore the San of Okathakanguti considered themselves to be the first settlers of this area.

There is no clinic, school, church or water point in Okathakanguti. The closest school is in Ombome B village (about 2 km away), the closest hospital is in Onesi and the closest clinic is at Eunda village (a three-hour walk from Okathakanguti). Okathakanguti residents get water from Ombome B.

8.3.4 Okapya

Okapya is 3 km from Oshikuku on the main tarred road between Oshikuku and Okalongo. The road divides the village into two, and participants regarded the two ‘halves’ as being separate communities despite their having the same name. Okapya is an Oshiwambo word meaning ‘small crop field’.

The study participants estimated Okapya’s total population to be 284, the largest proportion being from the Uukwambi group (63%). The total number of village households was estimated to be 43, of which 13 were San households, with an average of eight persons per household, which brings the total number of San to 104. The total non-San population was said to be 180, with approximately 30 households and an average of six persons per household. Of the 13 San households, five were female-headed, and female-headed households were larger in size than male-headed households.

Okapya’s San population consisted mostly of younger married couples. Most moved into this area recently from neighbouring villages where their parents resided (probably in the early to mid-1990s).

As in Okathakanguti, residents moved there when they established their own families and needed more land for crop farming.

Okapya lacked certain infrastructure, i.e. a school, a clinic and a police station, but the residents could access these in nearby settlements and towns: the nearest clinic was at Omagalanga, about 4 km away; and the nearest hospital, school and police station were in Oshikuku, about 3 km away.

The village did have water taps, but most of the San could not afford to pay for the water, so instead they collected water from the open canal running from Outapi to Oshakati – despite their view that the canal was unhygienic due to the presence of garbage. The cellphone network was operational.

8.4 Research findings

8.4.1 Livelihoods and poverty

San in Omusati Region derive their livelihoods primarily from their own agricultural fields, piecework, self-employment (shebeen ownership), selling arts and crafts, and pensions (Old Age Pension and War Veteran Pension). Food aid supplies were important for three of the four participating villages, and veldfood was important for the San's food security in all four villages. Formal employment and remittances were not available for most San in the region, but child labour provided support to households to a limited extent.

The regional government did not consider the region's San to be marginalised, thus the San do not receive special support from government – i.e. through the San Development Programme (SDP) run by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) – nor from other institutions in terms of agricultural equipment, seeds and/or capacity building. The regional government recently developed detailed plans and projects to support the San communities, but a lack of funds and other competing priorities have curtailed the implementation of these.



Wealth-ranking session
with San participants
in Okatseidhi village

Livelihood strategies

Subsistence agriculture

Almost all San in Omusati relied heavily on subsistence agriculture for household food consumption, and to some extent for trading. They have become accustomed to cultivating their own fields and harvesting crops to the extent that San households live from their crop produce for many months of the year. Land for crop farming was allocated by village headmen. Unlike the San in Ohangwena Region, San in Omusati regarded their own agricultural crop fields as an essential livelihood strategy.

The two main immediate challenges experienced in cultivation were the lack of draught-animal power and the lack of proper fencing around agricultural fields, resulting in the cultivation of insufficiently small parcels of land. The observed unequal power relations between San and Owambo residents in three of the four villages surveyed also contributed to these challenges. Unequal power relations between the main Owambo groups and San were evident in Okatseidhi, Okathakanguti and Okapya, but not as much in Amarika. The situation in Amarika was different because the majority of the residents were Ovakwakuti, whereas in the other three villages the majority were Owambo.

Piecework

Piecework and casual labour (e.g. herding cattle) were important livelihood strategies for generating cash income. Significant money was also generated by selling self-made products and through self-employment (owning shebeens) but not through formal employment. Very few of the discussion participants were formally employed either in or outside their villages, the exceptions being two caretakers responsible for the desalination plant in Amarika and youth from one household in Okapya. Piecework included erecting or repairing fences, cutting/chopping poles, collecting thatching grass, working in shebeens and doing domestic chores (fetching water, digging wells, herding livestock and cultivating crop fields).

Table 8.2: Types of piecework in Omusati by gender

Piecework done by men	Piecework done by women
Cutting/chopping poles	Running a <i>cuca</i> shop
Digging wells	Doing domestic chores
Working in crop fields	Working in crop fields
Herding cattle	Collecting thatching grass
Erecting or repairing fences	
Running a <i>cuca</i> shop	

(The cutting of poles for piecework is influenced by the rules, regulations and bylaws of both the Directorate of Forestry and local conservancies. Currently, poles can be cut only with a permit from the Directorate of Forestry. Such permits cost money, which renders them unaffordable for San, the result being a loss of piecework for them.)

Most piecework in this region, if not all, was undertaken by San for Owambo people, although very poor Owambo people also undertook piecework for other Owambo people in the region. Some San preferred to do piecework in the crop fields of Owambo farmers instead of working their own fields because this piecework provided an immediate return on their labour investment, whereas working one's own field did not immediately provide for the family – although it could provide food in the long term. Although piecework (together with other factors mentioned above) hampered the ability of San to prepare their own crop fields properly, it was needed for the San to survive.

The remuneration for piecework varied considerably, depending on the type of work. Payment for piecework usually took the form of cash, food, clothing or *otombo* (home-brewed beer). The payment method was normally agreed upfront between the work provider and the San worker. In some instances, piecework providers had failed to honour the payment agreement and had underpaid the San worker, and the worker had accepted less pay – a choice usually based on immediate needs. Some discussion participants noted that they were not happy to be paid with *otombo* as this meant that only they benefited rather than their family members. As one male participant said, “... we are not happy with *otombo* as payment, because when I drink *otombo*, my children go hungry.” Often the Owambo people providing work would just decide to pay in *otombo* on the grounds that the workers were San.

Some San were self-employed, such as the men and women in Okatseidhi and Amarika who ran their own shebeens. They could usually turn over about N\$40 per day, but still needed to purchase sugar for producing the next *otombo* stock. In the rainy season, some San in Okapya caught fish in the *oshanas/okangos* (shallow depressions seasonally inundated by rain) for their own consumption and also to sell. Men usually made the fishing hooks, women and children fished, and children were usually responsible for selling the fish.

Many San men – especially those living in villages known as cattle posts (e.g. Amarika) – engaged in herding cattle, which was a more regular type of employment but still one based on an informal arrangement. Usually the payment was made on a monthly basis. Herding cattle could bring in N\$250-300 per month, which was an important contribution to household needs – but then, losing a cow could cost the worker a few months’ salary.

The types of work that men did (e.g. herding cattle and digging wells) seemed to pay more than the types of work that women did (e.g. domestic chores).

Formal employment

In all four villages, only two participants in total were formally employed, and only one household had children working elsewhere. However, five people (two women and three men) of Okatseidhi and Amarika had been employed as soldiers in the past, and were now on War Veteran Pensions. Unemployment was a big concern for the San in all four villages. Throughout the discussions, participants continuously stressed the importance of formal employment. Participants in Okatseidhi, for example, were not expecting handouts from government, but rather were seeking employment opportunities so that they could take care of themselves. They also wanted to be better educated so that they could find employment. Participants in Okatseidhi village complained that employment opportunities were available only to Uukwaludhi people, and this was echoed in the other three villages. In Amarika, for example, participants cited jobs which had been created for San but were awarded to Uukwaludhi people instead. One such job was that of cleaner at the local clinic, which a San person could have done, but apparently San were not considered for the post. It was claimed that when government posts became vacant, the San were not informed about them, or they were given the wrong forms to fill in.

“It is just because Owambo want us [San] to remain poor. Those who are in top positions in government are Owambo, and only give jobs to Owambo and not other people. If you are San and you die, they do not care, because it is a San who died.”

– Discussion participant

Discussion participants continuously complained about discrimination against them by Owambo people. They stated that they were currently undermined by Owambo people because the San were poor, and were regarded as *Kwangara*, an Oshiwambo term meaning ‘feckless’ and/or ‘adrift’ – ‘those who do not think of tomorrow’, or ‘those who do not or cannot save for tomorrow’, or ‘those who neither have nor own anything’, or ‘people who live in the bush’. One San woman said that she has “not tasted Namibia’s independence yet”.

When asked what would need to happen to improve their situation, participants responded that they needed employment, good education, better healthcare, and better communication between the San and government. One respondent said, “Some of us are talented, even though we are not educated, we know how to work with our hands.”

Old Age and War Veteran Pensions, and grants for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)

Pension payments were regarded as an important source of income for some households, but the money was usually spent before it was received. The value of pension payments was reduced by debts at *cuca* shops (for food and *otombo*) and the fact that there were many members within a single household who all depended on pension payments as their only source of income. State pensioners received N\$550 per month (increased to N\$600 in April 2013). Most of this pension was spent on food for the household. Households with recipients of the Old Age Pension were normally regarded as better off than other San households, unless such a household had many members. Concerns were raised about the many elderly San who were not registered for pensions despite being eligible for this pension. The main challenge in respect of non-registration was a lack of vital national documentation or the presence of incorrect information on existing documentation. The same was true for many children who were eligible for the OVC Grant. A few San in Okatseidhi and Amarika (five in total) received a War Veteran Pension: a N\$50 000 once-off payout and N\$2 500 per month subsequently. These households were also considered better off.

Remittances

With the exception of one household in Okapya, none of the San households reported receiving remittances. This household’s children worked in major towns and sent money, food and/or clothing home when possible. This was regarded as an important source of income. Other households either did not have family members employed elsewhere, or those employed elsewhere (a rare situation) did not earn enough to send money home.

Child labour

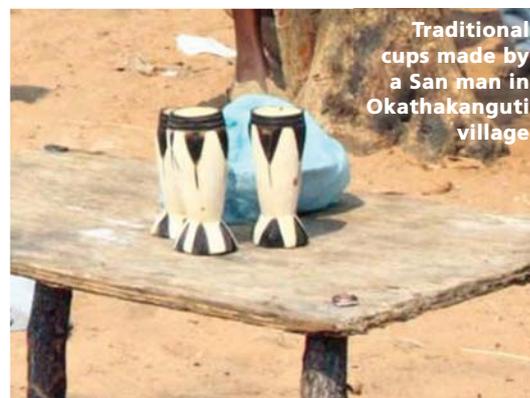
Child labour was another acceptable source of income at all four sites.³ San parents did not have a problem with their children working for Owambo families when such children were regarded as old enough for certain chores. Uukwaludhi households at all sites temporarily employed San children to look after cattle or do some other types of piecework, and either paid the child directly or paid the parents. San parents welcomed such opportunities as they contributed to the family’s wellbeing. The types of work in which San children engaged, such as carrying water, were not regarded as harmful,

³ In Namibia, almost all working children live in rural areas and undertake labour in communal settings. The NPC noted in 2010 that, “The majority of child workers are engaged in reasonable household chores that are considered as part of children’s family responsibilities.” (NPC 2010: 45) Poverty and inequality are seen as primary causes of child labour in Namibia. The perception of child labour is very different for people at grassroots level compared with lawmakers. Some chores which some people regard as acceptable may be illegal under Namibian law.

even though some children were expected to carry heavy containers of water over long distances, which could physically harm a child. Some children worked when they were supposed to be in school. The National Planning Commission (NPC 2010: 45) concluded that there might not be a clear understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable labour for a child to undertake.

Arts and crafts

San women made traditional baskets, necklaces, arm bands and clothes to generate income, and San men made traditional knives, bows, arrows and wooden cups. However, few women and men at the study sites engaged in these activities due to the lack of markets in which to sell such products. Arts and crafts were usually sold or exchanged within the villages, or otherwise in larger nearby settlements such as Onesi, Tsandi, Etilyasa or the town of Okahao. External support for these art and craft income-generating activities was non-existent in Omusati Region.



Veldfood

A variety of veldfoods were gathered by the San at all four research sites (see Table 8.3). These foods were gathered in and around villages and eaten on a daily basis when in season. San people also sold mopane worms as an income-generating activity, or traded them for used clothing.

Food aid

Food aid, including drought relief food, food-for-work and food-for-cash initiatives, target the whole population of Omusati Region rather than only marginalised groups. Constituency offices had lists of people of various ethnicities who were in dire need of food supplies, but had yet to be reached through these initiatives. In three of the four villages, food aid in all its forms was not seen as an important food source supplement because its provision was unreliable and inconsistent. San participants noted that they never knew when food was supposed to be distributed, what types of food they were supposed to receive, or the quantity, therefore they could not rely on food support – but they did appreciate it when it came. By contrast, Okapya participants regarded food aid as important. They reported having received food two to three times over the last year – although the last supply had arrived in June 2012 – four months prior to the discussion). This included one 12.5 kg bag of maize-meal, one 750 ml bottle of cooking oil and two tins of fish. Mosimane and Mbandi (2009: 18) indicated that the Omusati conservancy communities regarded government food support programmes (e.g. drought relief) as an important livelihood source, so in respect of food security the conservancy communities were in a similar situation as the San of Okapya.

Livestock

Very few San households owned cattle, donkeys or goats, but many owned small numbers of chickens (although poor San households did not own these either). The Okatseidhi San community collectively owned four donkeys which the Deputy Prime Minister had donated to this community under the OPM's SDP, although the San residents appeared to have no access to them. San participants claimed that Owambo households had authority over the donkeys, although the San headman still looked after them. None of the other villages owned communal livestock.

Hunting

Hunting was no longer regarded as a livelihood strategy because of new laws to control the killing of wild animals. Though not necessarily happy with these laws, participants claimed that they adhere to them.⁴

Food security

Food insecurity among the San in Omusati was a concern (because of limited quantities of food), but was much better than in Ohangwena Region. This was mainly due to the fact that most Omusati San cultivated their own crop fields and thus were less dependent on external support for food security.

The number of meals that households ate depended largely on access to land, ability to cultivate the land accessed, and the household size and income. Most households reported that they ate two meals per day; some households who were regarded as very poor ate only one meal per day, and those who were regarded as well off ate three meals per day. Most of those who ate three meals per day were households with a recipient of the War Veteran Pension.

In most cases schoolgoing children had two meals per day: one meal at school and one at home in the evening. Those children who did not go to school and accompanied their parents to shebeens during the day were given *otombo* when hungry, as there was no food available at these shebeens.

Main food items

The San depended mostly on subsistence crops and veldfood for food security, but also accessed other types of foods by purchasing and/or exchanging labour or various commodities. The main crops cultivated by the San included *omahangu* (pearl millet), maize, sorghum, beans, groundnuts and watermelon. Mosimane and Mbandi (2009: 16) found that “San families are subsistence crop producers and seldom produce surplus for sale”, and our research confirmed this finding, as many participants noted that their crop supplies ran out before the next harvesting season. Various types of veldfoods were available during the rainy season, and some were available throughout the year. Veldfoods were used as relish for *omahangu* and maize porridge, but were also eaten by themselves and were usually eaten on a daily basis, depending on availability and seasonality. However, certain wild fruits were not eaten on a daily basis because they were not collected regularly.

Access to food depended on various factors: the right circumstance for cultivation; access to social grants (e.g. the Old Age and War Veteran Pensions); piecework; and having a small informal business (shebeens or sales of arts and crafts and tools).

“The foods that we eat frequently are the foods that we grow in our fields. But the foods that we buy with money are the foods that we eat less frequently, because we can only buy when we can afford it.”

– Participant in Okatseidhi

⁴ This reaffirms the claim cited in Mosimane and Mbandi (2009: 20): “The San claimed that since the establishment of the conservancy, quality of live [sic] has been declining because they are not allowed to hunt.”

Pounding *omahangu* in Okathakanguti village



Table 8.3 shows the foods to which San across the four sites have access. The frequency at which different foods were eaten across the four sites is detailed in Table 8.4. It must be noted that not all San households within a village or across the four participating villages (or at the sites visited for other studies cited in this chapter, e.g. Mosimane and Mbandi 2009) were homogeneous, therefore frequencies differ per household depending on above-mentioned factors.

Table 8.3: Foods available to the San in Omusati

From the crop fields	Mostly bought	Veldfoods*	
<i>Omahangu</i> (pearl millet) Maize Beans Groundnuts Watermelon Pumpkin	Potatoes Onions Sweet potatoes Fruit Carrots Rice/macaroni Cabbage Meat Fish Cooking oil	Rainy season: <i>Eshegele</i> <i>Omadhamba</i> <i>Enyekulushe</i> Mopane worms <i>Okatalashe</i> worms <i>Omboga</i> (spinach) <i>Ombutu</i> (tuber) <i>Ombeke</i> (berry) <i>Eendunga</i> (Makalani nuts) <i>Eembanyu</i>	Throughout the year: <i>Enuwa</i> (watermelon) <i>Embibo</i> (root) <i>Ombu</i> (berry) <i>Enanga</i> (melon seeds) <i>Onyandi</i> (berry)

* The assistant who checked the Oshiwambo terms for the veldfoods could not identify those which are not specified in brackets.

Table 8.4: Frequency of foods eaten at the four study sites in Omusati

	Okatseidhi	Amarika	Okathakanguti	Okapya
Most frequent	<i>Omahangu</i> Sorghum <i>Oshikundu</i> (non-alcoholic drink made from fermented millet) Pumpkin Watermelon Groundnuts Beans	<i>Omahangu</i> Maize-meal <i>Oshikundu</i> Milk <i>Otombo</i>	<i>Omahangu</i> Sorghum Cooking oil <i>Onona</i> <i>Emange</i>	<i>Omahangu</i> <i>Oshikundu</i> Beans Cooking oil
		Beans <i>Okatalashe</i> (worms from kraal)	<i>Oshikundu</i> Beans	
	Maize-meal Meat Cabbage Potatoes Rice Onions Cooking oil		Maize-meal Traditional bread	Maize-meal Traditional bread
		Meat	<i>Onyandi</i> (berry) <i>Enuwa</i> (watermelon) <i>Ombu</i> (berry) <i>Eshegele</i> <i>Embibo</i> (root) <i>Eendunga</i>	Fish Milk Cooking oil Chicken meat Groundnuts Mopane worms <i>Ombu</i> Frogs <i>Omboga</i> (spinach) <i>Eshegele</i>
			Cabbage	
Least frequent	Sweet potatoes Carrots Fruits	Fruits	Fish Meat Bread	Meat (beef, rats, dog, donkey) Bread Cooking oil Biscuits <i>Euni</i> Tea/coffee Macaroni/rice

The staple food across all of the participating villages was *omahangu*, followed by sorghum and maize. *Omahangu* was said to be the main crop as it was eaten on a daily basis across the four villages as a soft or hard porridge mixed with different types of relish such as cabbage, meat or veldfoods. Maize-meal was eaten when distributed by government, but was also bought for consumption, especially at the end of the month when the social grants were paid out. Maize-meal was therefore not eaten frequently in the villages visited, especially in households which did not have a regular cash income. Some San, especially some of those living in Amarika and villages surrounding Amarika, grew more maize than *omahangu* as maize was their personal preference, thus they ate more maize than San in other villages.

The San Headman of Okatseidhi village, Mr Oman, and his wife, with filled *omahangu* silos in the background



Beans, groundnuts, watermelon and pumpkin were eaten on a daily basis, or less frequently when availability was scarce. The participants in only two of the villages reported eating fruits, though infrequently (see Table 8.4 on the previous page), while participants in the remaining two did not report eating fruit at all. Vegetables were more likely to be eaten by schoolgoing children as part of the government school feeding scheme. Rice and macaroni were eaten by some households in one village only, but very rarely. Rice was sold at some of the local shebeens in the villages visited.

Meat was rarely eaten in these villages. It was only available when an animal was slaughtered for a funeral or wedding, or when a sick animal died and its meat was put on sale. Even if meat was sold locally, San sometimes did not have the necessary cash to buy it, but occasionally they would exchange *omahangu* for meat.

Fish was usually purchased in the main settlements, at a cost of between N\$5 and N\$10. In Okapya tins of fish were also received as food aid. Chicken meat was not eaten frequently as there were insufficient numbers of chickens. As one participant put it, “We will finish our chickens if we eat them frequently.” Meat types eaten by San varied across the villages but included beef, goat, donkey, chicken, rats and dogs.

Milk was used for human consumption on a daily basis in Amarika, most likely because this village is a cattle post with many cattle. In the other villages milk was not mentioned as an important food item.

Cooking oil was used in three of the four villages. It was used on a daily basis by many households in Okathakanguti and Okapya, and less frequently in Okatseidhi. In Amarika it was not mentioned at all. San households in Okapya accessed cooking oil through food aid, and San at the other two villages produced their own oil from the marula fruit.

Households in Okathakanguti also accessed vegetables when they engaged in temporary work on the Etunda Irrigation Scheme in the northern part of Omusati Region (approximately 20 km away). This gave them access not only to money but also to maize and vegetables (e.g. cabbage).

Drinking *otombo* seemed to be an important leisure activity for almost all residents across the four participating villages, including both Owambo and San. Owambo and San families would spend many hours a day at the local shebeens drinking *otombo* and socialising with fellow villagers. While



some San would first work on their fields and then visit the shebeens, others would wake up in the morning and go straight there. This was observed by the data collection team on many occasions, but especially in Okatseidhi and Amarika.

All participants noted that they drank *otombo*, with the exception of a few San who were on treatment for tuberculosis. Several other homemade alcoholic drinks are consumed locally.⁵ *Otombo* was regarded as the strongest in terms of alcoholic content. Participants noted that they liked *otombo* as it was fermented with sugar, which gave them energy to work in their fields. Indeed, both male and female participants agreed that they could not work in their fields without drinking *otombo*: “When we are going to our field we are taking a calabash of *otombo* with – we need the energy. Also when you ask somebody to help you on your field you will just buy *otombo* for that person. We will work and drink together.” Participants noted that they drank *otombo* as a “refreshment”, to “talk a lot”, to “feel happy” and to “feel totally good”. They also indicated that when they are hungry, *otombo* can take away the hunger pangs: “Yes, of course, if I feel hungry and take *otombo*, I will not feel hungry until the next day.”

Children in the villages also drank homemade alcoholic drinks. Participants reported that all children, except babies who were breastfeeding, drank homemade alcoholic drinks. In some villages children drank *okaketere* or *okanyatau* instead of *otombo*. *Oshikundu* (non-alcoholic) was actually the preferred drink for children who were hungry or needed refreshment. It is noteworthy that all participants agreed that it is not right for children to drink homemade alcoholic beverages.



Excessive consumption of homemade alcohol has historically impacted negatively on the ability of local people (both San and non-San) to undertake labour and spend the necessary amount of time on food production. Some of the village headmen in Omusati have responded to this problem by imposing rules, such as restricting the opening of shebeens to afternoon hours. In some villages (e.g. in Amarika) the headman had also invited the police to close the shebeens when important community meetings were being held, to ensure that people attended the meetings instead of visiting the shebeens.

⁵ *Okanyatau, mapwaka, epwaka and okaterere.*

Challenges to food security

Most of the San reported that food from crop harvests was insufficient in supply and rarely lasted until the next harvest. The main challenge in respect of the San's crop fields was the absence of fences. Most complained that their crop fields were frequently destroyed by the livestock belonging to Owambo families because of the lack of proper fences. San indicated that they lacked the tools and materials (e.g. wire) that they needed to construct fencing.

The second main challenge was the lack of agricultural equipment and livestock to support crop farming. San did not earn sufficient income to purchase ploughs, hoes and other crop-farming equipment. Those who cultivated their fields normally borrowed equipment from Owambo families, but the equipment could only be borrowed once Owambo families had already cultivated their own fields, leaving very little time for San households to prepare their own fields (or no time at all). In Okatseidhi it was said that the community donkeys were used by Owambo families first, leaving little or no time for the San to use them. Another challenge was manpower: young San sometimes preferred to do piecework for the Owambo people rather than working in their parents' fields or building/repairing fences because they received immediate payment. Other threats to good harvests were droughts and pests.

Access to land for crop farming was not a challenge for most San as land was readily available on request. Nevertheless, some San reported an inability to pay for such land: in Amarika, some Ovakwakuti people had difficulties accessing fields because they could not pay the required once-off payment of N\$600 per field to the Ovakwakuti headman.

Coping mechanisms in time of food shortages

The most important coping mechanism, as mentioned above, was the consumption of *otombo* and other alcoholic beverages in order to satisfy hunger in times of food shortages.

Despite this, residents would ask the village headmen for food support during these times, and in turn he would ask the constituency councillors for support. The councillors' office seemed to be responsive, but only to those in dire need. It is assumed that this was because of limited supplies of food aid and in order to avoid increasing dependency among people.

Begging for food was seen as a last resort. Some San households resorted to begging only once all of their food had run out and when veldfoods were not available. Those begging approached Owambo households because San households did not have much to share. It was difficult to determine how often begging took place because circumstances differed from one household to the other and depended on their needs. Begging was regarded as a survival strategy only; it was not a preferred means for achieving a livelihood.

Perceptions of poverty and wealth

The San's perceptions of poverty and wealth were determined by means of a participatory approach (described in detail in Part 1 of this report), and were based on local attributes of wealth. Indicators of wealth were employment, education, livestock, land, agricultural equipment, social grants and businesses. Remittances played a role in only one village. Indicators of wealth were, inter alia, food, clothing, household goods and housing.

Table 8.5: Number of San households per wealth category (total 95 households)

Village	Very rich	Rich	Middle	Poor	Very poor	Total
Okatseidhi	5	3	3	8	11	30
Amarika	0	7	0	21	11	39
Okathakanguti	0	0	0	1	9	10
Okapya	0	0	2	13	1	16
Total	5	10	5	43	32	95

Most of the San households (78.9%) across the four participating villages were regarded as being ‘poor’ (45.2%) or ‘very poor’ (33.8%). It is noteworthy that 5% of the San households in Omusati were regarded as ‘very rich’ and 10% as ‘rich’, compared with Ohangwena Region where no San household was regarded as falling within either of these two categories. The remaining 5% of San households in Omusati were regarded as in the ‘middle’ (somewhere between rich and poor). The factors contributing to San being either ‘rich’ or ‘very rich’ were formal employment and being a war veteran (see Table 8.6 on the next page), and most of the San households regarded as ‘very rich’ were in receipt of War Veteran Pensions.⁶ These people could also have crop fields with fences, tools, enough food, some livestock, good clothes and good hygiene. The other attributes for ‘very rich’ (see Table 8.6), such as possessing a brick or zinc house, many livestock, a good education and formal employment, were relevant to Owambo households primarily and not to San households in the ‘very rich’ category. Okatseidhi and Amarika were the only villages with ‘rich’ and ‘very rich’ San people, mainly because of War Veteran Pensions.



⁶ Recipients of the War Veteran Pension were regarded as ‘very rich’ and ‘rich’ because they received N\$2 500 per month (which San regard as a lot of money), even if some became ‘poor’ due to spending most of their money on alcohol.

Households regarded as ‘poor’, ‘very poor’ and in the ‘middle’ shared the following common attributes: crop fields with no fences, limited to no harvest, no livestock, no brick or zinc house, no car and no beds. Some of the ‘very poor’ households received an Old Age Pension, but these households were still regarded as ‘very poor’ because of their large size. For example, one pensioner living in Okathakanguti had 13 grandchildren whom she looked after using only her pension. Disability Grants also separated ‘poor’ from ‘very poor’ households – showing the importance of social security services provided by the state for those in need. All San households except for the ‘very poor’ ones owned chickens. It should be noted that for participants at Okapya, general hygiene was considered an attribute of wealth for the San. They pointed out that ‘very poor’ people did not have good hygiene, while the opposite was true of ‘rich’ and ‘very rich’ people. It is also noteworthy that the participants of one community (Okapya) included “respect” as an indicator of wealth, stating that people who were ‘very poor’ were disrespected by other community members.

Table 8.6: Wealth attributes of San households in Omusati

Very rich	Rich	Middle	Poor	Very poor
Formally employed		Piecework	Piecework (one person employed at desalination plant, earning N\$200/month)	No piecework, or a few have some piecework
War Veteran Pension	War Veteran Pension (but spent too much on alcohol)			
Crop fields with wire fences	Crop fields with fences	Crop fields with no fences	Crop fields with no fences	Crop fields with no fences
Agricultural tools	Agricultural tools	Hoes	No agricultural tools	No agricultural tools
Harvest lasts a year	Harvest lasts a year		Limited harvest	No harvest, and beg for food
Many cattle	Few cattle	No cattle	No cattle	No cattle
Many goats	Few goats	No goats	No goats	No goats
Donkeys	Donkeys	No donkeys	No donkeys	No donkeys
Pigs				
Chickens	Chickens	±3 chickens	±3 chickens	No chickens
Brick house	Brick house	No brick house	No brick house	Live with other people
Zinc house		Zinc house	No zinc house	
Car (maybe two)	Car	No car	No car	No car
Beds	Some have beds	No beds	No beds	No beds
Good clothes		Clothes and shoes	Old clothes and shoes	Torn clothes
	Shebeen	Shebeen	No shebeen	No shebeen
	Old Age Pension	Old Age Pension	No Old Age Pension, or only a few*	No Old Age Pension, or only a few*
		Sell mopane worms	Sell mopane worms	Do not sell mopane worms
			Get disability grants	
Good education	Good education		Poor education	Poor education
				Large families
		Remittance	Remittance (Okapya)	No remittance
Good hygiene			Better hygiene	Poor hygiene
				Disrespected by others (Okapya)

* Those who do not have the necessary documentation to prove their age do not receive this pension.

San participants categorised almost all Owambo households as ‘very rich’ or ‘rich’; only a few were regarded as belonging to the ‘middle’ category or the ‘poor’ category, and no Owambo household was regarded as being ‘very poor’.

The San at the research sites generally perceived themselves as being similar to other San in Omusati Region with regard to wealth status. Remarkably, they were of the opinion that they were worse off in comparison to San in other regions who received external support from government. This is interesting because San in Omusati were observably better off than most of the San in Ohangwena Region where extensive government support was provided to them. Some were aware of the external support to certain San communities in Ohangwena Region and could speak informatively about the houses and agricultural equipment provided to those communities.

San in Omusati appeared to be better off than San in Ohangwena because the following factors:

- security on the land on which they lived and cultivated;
- access to more food items as they cultivated their own fields;
- access to more money because they could use produce from fields to trade for clothes or other commodities;
- more seemed to have access to War Veteran Pensions; and
- they owned more small stock and more chickens.

To the research team it appeared that San in Omusati Region were living in more hygienic conditions because of the types of homesteads which they had built for themselves. Also, their children were dressed in clothes that appeared to be of better quality. As compared with Ohangwena, more San children in Omusati enrolled in primary school, more graduated to secondary school and more completed secondary school. The San in Omusati were also less dependent on external support for their livelihood.

Very few San had experienced upward social mobility, although the Old Age Pension and War Veteran Pension did provide the means for some to move up the social ladder. Five San in Okatseidhi had moved from being regarded as ‘poor’ to being ‘rich’ or ‘very rich’ because of the War Veteran Pension. They received a once-off payment of N\$50 000 and a monthly pension payout of N\$2 500. These factors are outside the influence of individuals, however, meaning that it is impossible for people not receiving these pensions to become better off of their own volition. Participants also gave examples of people who moved back and forth from one wealth category to the next.

“My husband was working and with his money we used to buy our food and paid for school fees. During that time we were regarded as poor. Then we received my husband’s war veteran payout and pension and became rich. But now we are not rich, because my husband drinks a lot and is not working anymore.”

– Female participant in Okatseidhi

Another example was that of a San woman who had started to receive a War Veteran Pension and was regarded as ‘rich’. She started eating meat and drinking every day. She had many goats and donkeys, but these herds did not last because she ate meat often. Ultimately, by the time of fieldwork, she was considered to be ‘poor’. This implies that “using money wisely” is also regarded as a factor influencing wealth – and the same applies for many study sites in other regions. A factor that caused people to move downwards in terms of social mobility was age, since elderly people could not look after their livestock anymore, with the result that they lost their herds. None of the households had moved upwards socially because of external support from government or NGOs.

Most of the participants identified the main causes of poverty as being a lack of education and a lack of employment opportunities for San in Omusati. This view differed to that of the Ohangwena participants, most of whom who said that a lack of external support was the main factor contributing to poverty.

8.4.2 Access to land

All San in the four participating communities stated that they had access to land like all other people in the region.⁷ Most of the San in Amarika, Okatseidhi, Okathakanguti and Okapya actually had land for crop farming and building homesteads.⁸ However, there were a few in Amarika who reported that they could not afford to pay the required N\$600 to the San (Ovakwakuti) headman for the land and therefore remained landless.⁹ Other landless San in the four villages indicated that they had not requested land because they lacked the necessary agricultural equipment and livestock to make proper use of it.

All the San interviewed lived in communal villages within the regional boundaries. All focus group discussions found that the San were the first inhabitants of the land on which they were currently living. In three of the four participating communities (Okapya being the exception), the land on which the San lived fell under the jurisdiction of San headmen. San headmen in these three villages had jurisdiction over decision making within the village boundaries, including allocation of land. However, the San headmen were presided over by Owambo senior headmen who reported to the kings of the respective Owambo groups.

8.4.3 Identity, culture and heritage

The San in Omusati have been integrated into the Owambo culture to such an extent that San people across the four participating villages – and many of the communities in the conservancies – have adopted aspects of Owambo culture, such as language, dress codes, names, agricultural practices, dwelling-construction practices, economic activities, politics and religion. Mixed relationships and marriages are fairly common.

The following are the cultural changes noted in the study:

- All San spoke Oshiwambo dialects only; none of the participants remembered the name of the San language spoken by their ancestors, and none spoke a San language.
- All San had adopted Oshiwambo names; none had San names.
- The architecture of San homes and homesteads was exactly the same as that of the Owambo people.
- Gathering of veldfoods was decreasing.
- Hunting was not practised, primarily because it is against the law.
- Nomadic movements were not taking place.
- San wedding and funeral ceremonies were no longer practised. Owambo dances were practised but not San dances.
- Many women dressed in traditional Owambo dresses.

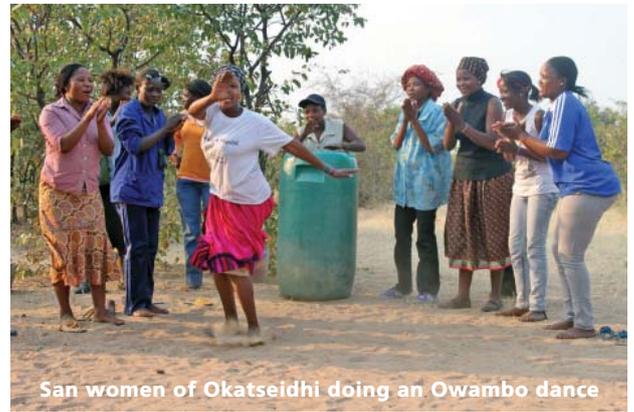
⁷ This is consistent with statements from the San living in Uukolonkadhi and Sheya Uushona conservancies (Mosimane and Mbandi 2009: 15).

⁸ Please note that this means that the San paid a certain amount for the plots on which they live and cultivate, but that they do not have legal documentation proving that the land belongs to (or is 'owned' by) them.

⁹ According to the regulations of the Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002, the payment of N\$600 to the headman or traditional authority is illegal.



A San woman dressed in Owambo cultural attire in Okatseidhi village



San women of Okatseidhi doing an Owambo dance

The San in Omusati were usually referred to as *Kwangara* (see page 300 for an explanation of this term). However, many San did not appreciate being referred to as such due to the negative connotations attached to the word when referring to an individual. Our discussions made evident that ‘Kwangara’ is a social label that identifies people of a lower socio-economic class generally, rather than people of an ethnic group with cultural and linguistic markers. Many San indicated that they would refer to themselves as Ongandjera, Uukwaludhi, etc. when identifying themselves to people outside their respective villages – in Oshakati or Okahao for example. San participants also referred to themselves as *Ayelele*, an Oshiwambo term meaning ‘light-skinned people’, which was said to be a new term that the local government officials used. San preferred this term because they regarded it as less derogative – however this term did not come up in discussions unless the researchers referred to it. Furthermore, the participants were aware of the word ‘San’, but would not refer to themselves as such – nor, indeed, did they refer to themselves as ‘Bushmen’. For example, participants in Okathakanguti noted that they were not Bushmen, as the real Bushmen lived in Tsumkwe, were light in skin colour and spoke a different language. Remarkably, San in Okatseidhi indicated that although they could not speak the language of the San in Tsumkwe, and had never even met them, they still felt a “connection” with them.

8.4.4 Relationships with other groups

The main groups with whom San in Omusati have relationships are the Ongandjera, Uukwaludhi, Kwanyama, Uukolonkadhi, Omabalantu and Uukwambi (all Oshiwambo-speaking groups), and to a lesser extent the Herero, Himba and Nama/Damara. This section focuses mainly on relationships between San and Owambo people, as the latter constitute the vast majority of the region’s inhabitants. Relationships between San and Owambo people take a number of forms: employer-employee, sexual partners, spouses, fellow villagers, fellow drinkers and fellow committee members.

San relationships with Owambo people are currently essential to the survival of San people because the Owambo provide the San with piecework, food, transportation, communications, leadership and support for funerals and weddings, as well as support in times of crisis. However, the study found such relationships to be highly exploitative, with San finding themselves in subordinate positions at all levels. Owambo people often treated San in the same way that people generally treat children – as people who did not know much and/or could not take care of themselves. San were looked upon as drunks who were dependent on Owambo people for their survival.

As in other regions, many San in Omusati raised their concern about discrimination against San in relation to job applications. They perceived their chances of employment as being minimal, even if they had the same skills as Owambo applicants. Owambo people were mostly the ones in charge of

employing others in the region, and participants gave examples of nursing study and employment opportunities at Tsandi District Hospital being given to Owambo people when they could have been given to San. It was said that San frequently registered for employment in the Namibian Police or Namibian Defence Force, but never heard from the registrars again. San people had therefore lost all hope of finding full-time employment. Some indicated that the only way for their families to improve their status was for their children to complete secondary school successfully and to then try to study further.

In Omusati, both male and female San engaged in ‘romantic’ and sexual relations with Owambo females and males. There were many examples of San males who married Owambo females, and San females who married Owambo males. In Ohangwena, on the other hand, it was rare to find a San male in a ‘romantic’ or sexual relationship with an Owambo female, whereas some Owambo men in Ohangwena did have such a relationship with San women. Traditional practices with regard to pregnancies out of wedlock were not adhered to when the pregnant female was San. A female San participant noted that it was Uukwaludhi tradition for the male’s family to pay the female’s family when the male impregnated the female outside of marriage, but no such payment was made when an Uukwaludhi male impregnated a San female outside of marriage. When asked why, one participant said, “Just because we are San and they do not see us as people equal to them.”

8.4.5 Education

Most people (87%) in Omusati Region have attended school, and most (88%) are literate (NSA 2013: 18).

Early childhood development

None of the four participating villages had a kindergarten. Children in Okathakanguti could attend the kindergarten in Ombome B village (about 2 km away), which was said to charge N\$50 per child per term. As most San parents could not afford this payment, they did not send their children there.

Primary education

It was not problematic for San parents to enrol and keep their children in lower-primary grades. Those who dropped out of primary school in Okatseidhi reportedly did so due to ill health, and mental health problems were said to be the main reason – a reason cited numerous times.

Secondary education

In Okatseidhi the team met a young San woman who was very enthusiastic about life, completed Grade 12 three years before our visit, and was now looking for opportunities to further her studies. Most San children were not as fortunate as this woman, however, and did not have the opportunity to complete Grade 12. As was the case in other regions, one of the major challenges to secondary education for the San of Omusati was that the secondary schools were generally far from the San villages. Therefore, to access secondary education, San children had to move from their homes and live with other (non-San) families or in school hostels. Parents of San children were very concerned about this. One respondent asked, “Is there no one who can help us with this situation? Can you please tell this to the relevant ministries?” Most San children of Omusati moved in with Owambo families, and some moved in with Herero families – as was the case with children of Okatseidhi village. In most cases, reportedly, Owambo and Herero host families treated the San children well,

but concerns were raised about some San children being treated unfairly. Examples were given of some guardians who kept San children at home to work while their own children went to school. Most of the San children who went off to live with other families returned home without completing their secondary schooling, for the following reasons:

- bullying by other children and in some cases by teachers;
- unfair treatment by host families;
- homesickness;
- not fitting in;
- not having a school uniform (which is not compulsory for attending school, but children fear discrimination when they do not have a uniform);
- inability to pay school fees;
- teenage pregnancy;
- having to work to support the family;
- no enforcement by parents;
- too old for the grade;
- ill health; and
- not progressing well, or failure.

San parents also raised their concern that not one of the teachers in the region was San. Discussion participants, especially in Okatseidhi, continuously indicated that they needed San teachers because San teachers understand San parents and learners better than non-San teachers do.

Tertiary education

Reportedly none of the San in Omusati had ever attended a tertiary educational institution, and there were no such institutions in this region at the time of the fieldwork. Unfortunately participants had no information about support available to San students through the OPM's SDP.

Children and their teachers at the primary school in Amarika



Table 8.7 provides a summary of information on education as reported by study participants in the four participating villages.

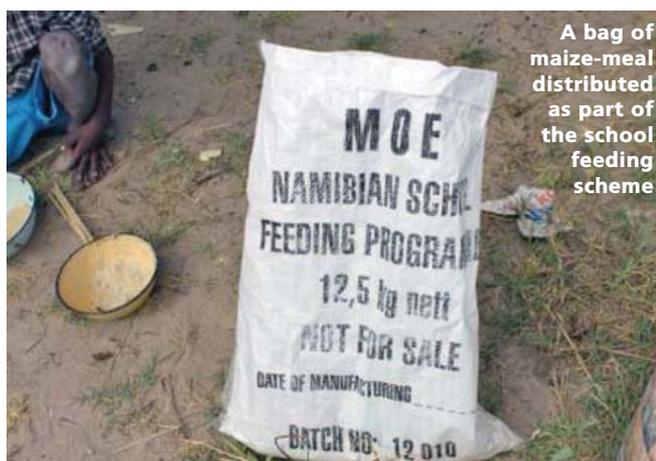
Table 8.7: Summary of information on San education in Omusati*

Village	Distance to primary school	School fees (de facto)	Reasons for San learners dropping out of school	Importance of education
Okatseidhi	Less than 200 m	N\$6 (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School (Grade 7) too far away • Ill health • Cannot afford the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) – to complete Grade 10 • Not allowed to return to Grade 10 after failure due to Ministry of Education (MoE) policy at the time • Teenage pregnancy • Mistreatment by Owambo host family • Did not want to proceed 	Very important
Amarika	Less than 200 m		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to secondary school • Cannot afford school fees 	Very important
Okathakanguti	Around 2 km – in Ombome B	N\$50 (K) N\$30 (P) N\$90 (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long distance • Cannot afford school uniform • Cannot afford school fees • Looking after cattle (herding) • Cannot afford transportation • Over age for grade • Teenage pregnancy • No enforcement by parents 	Very important
Okapya	Around 3 km – in Oshikuku		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot afford school fees • Cannot afford school uniform • Orphaned • Over age for grade • Parents do not know why children dropped out – no motivation • Need to look for jobs • Need to look for food • Weak in school • Teenage pregnancy 	Very important

* P = primary school, S = secondary school and K = kindergarten

School feeding scheme

The school feeding scheme was very important for San children because this gave them their second or third meal each day (see subsections on food security and main food items, page 302ff). All primary schools had a school feeding scheme. San children attending secondary school ate in the school hostels or the homes of their host families.



A bag of maize-meal distributed as part of the school feeding scheme

Importance of education

“Education brings development, when one is educated, she/he will know how to develop themselves. Everything good in this world is brought about by education. We are like this because we are uneducated.”

– Discussion participant in Amarika

Most participants linked higher education with better employment opportunities, noting that children who finished secondary school and tertiary education could get better-paid jobs than those with only primary education. They believed that a person who completed Grade 12 could become a nurse, government minister, president of the country, councillor, teacher or computer technician, or they could do office work. They also stated that those with only primary education would only be herders, do domestic work, work in shebeens or become shop assistants. However, as already noted, participants had concerns that even San children with Grade 12 would have difficulties in finding employment due to what they described as discrimination, favouritism and corruption. All participants noted that it was the responsibility of parents to send children to school and to ensure that they remained in school; it was not the choice of the child. However, some parents were not able to motivate their children to remain in school.

In sum, most San children in Omusati went to primary school, a few proceeded to secondary school, a few completed Grade 12, but none (by the time of our visit) had ever progressed to tertiary level. On average, according to our observations and in contrast to many other regions, San women tended to have higher levels of education than San men. This was also reflected in their being more vocal than men in the discussions, and more eager than men to respond to questions.

8.4.6 Health

Table 8.8 provides a health summary for the four Omusati sites visited.

Table 8.8: Summary of information on San health in Omusati

Information sought	Okatseidhi	Amarika	Okathakanguti	Okapya
Main diseases (according to participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tuberculosis (TB) ● HIV/AIDS ● Malaria ● Diarrhoea ● Chicken pox ● STIs ● Malnutrition ● Toothache ● Lymphatic swellings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TB ● HIV/AIDS ● Malaria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TB ● HIV/AIDS ● Malaria ● Diarrhoea ● Polio ● Headaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TB ● HIV/AIDS ● Malaria
Main illnesses for children*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chicken pox ● Mental problems ● Epilepsy (probably) ● Toothaches ● Sores on the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Malaria ● Diarrhoea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Malaria ● Diarrhoea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Malaria ● Diarrhoea
Access to health services	Clinic in village	Clinic in village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 3-hour walk to Etunda ● 4-hour walk to Onesi 	Nearby – Oshikuku District Hospital or Omakalanga clinic
Payment required	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ambulance/transport	None	None	None	Sometimes ambulance available
Traditional medicine	No	No	No	Yes
Where do women deliver?	At home	At home	At home	Oshikuku District Hospital
Alcohol/violence	Serious concern	Serious concern	Serious concern	Serious concern
Alcohol and children	Yes, drink traditional alcoholic beverages	Yes, drink traditional alcoholic beverages	Yes, drink traditional alcoholic beverages	Yes, drink traditional alcoholic beverages
Drug use	None	None	None	None
Outside health support	None	None	Namibia Red Cross Society (NRCS); Total Control of the Epidemic (TCE) programme	Catholic Aids Action (CAA) community health workers

* Almost all San children had received the standard vaccinations provided by government.

Main illnesses

Across the four sites, the illnesses most commonly mentioned as illnesses which are serious and could cause death were tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS, malaria and diarrhoea.

Most San could speak informatively about the causes of TB, methods to prevent it, and treatment for this illness. TB infections were attributed to alcohol abuse, people coughing close to each other, and people not having enough blankets (in that people share blankets and thus sleep very close to each other, thereby increasing the risk of infection).¹⁰ Participants in Omusati noted that many lives were lost due to TB because of the failure of patients to adhere to their medication regimen, mainly due to alcohol abuse.

HIV and AIDS were regarded as serious problems because many San men and women in the region have reportedly died of AIDS. Participants could speak informatively about basic infection transmission and infection prevention methods. They noted that children can also be infected via mother-to-child-transmission, and that both boy and girl children were equally vulnerable to this form of transmission.

Most participants across the four village were informed about malaria transmission and methods to prevent this illness. Participants noted that many people have passed away because of malaria. The main challenge was a lack of mosquito nets. Households compensated for this lack by using herbs and/or smoke from burning certain types of wood to keep mosquitoes away.

Diarrhoea was a concern in only two villages (Okatseidhi and Okathakanguti), mainly because of hygiene and water quality. This illness had been a concern in Amarika in the past, but the problem was solved when the desalination plant was constructed, resulting in residents having access to safe water. Other illnesses regarded as serious (but which did not cause death) and illnesses regarded as not serious are detailed in Table 8.9.

A lack of sanitation facilities was not mentioned as a challenge. All of the San at these sites used the bush as their primary sanitation facility. In contrast to the San in Ohangwena, those in Omusati did not mention a lack of soap for washing their bodies or clothes as a factor contributing to poor health.

Main diseases for children

The main illnesses experienced by children were malaria, diarrhoea, chicken pox, mental health problems, epilepsy, toothache and body sores. Malaria in children was caused by children not being covered with blankets in households which did not have mosquito nets. Malnutrition was not mentioned as a concern, except in Okatseidhi. The research team did not see any obvious signs of malnutrition.

Table 8.9: Status of illnesses based on participants' opinions at the four Omusati sites

Serious illnesses, but do not cause death	Not serious illnesses, but occurring frequently
Eye diseases	Cholera
Toothache	Body aches
Chest pains	Flu
Gout	
Ear problems	

¹⁰ No one mentioned smoking and sharing of pipes and cigarettes as a transmission method as in Ohangwena. It should be noted that very few San participants in Omusati were smokers, an observation which differed markedly to that in Ohangwena where most participants smoked tobacco.

Pregnancy

Pregnant San women usually gave birth at home, but some did visit health facilities a few days after giving birth when they were physically strong to make the journey. Delivery of babies by (experienced) midwives in villages was a common practice for all households in the four villages. The only challenge mentioned with regard to home delivery was the lack of gloves (excluding other challenges in emergency cases). Some pregnant women who lived close to hospitals (e.g. the Oshikuku District Hospital) used the hospital facilities for delivery if they had money. For women at most sites, a lack of access to transportation services (ambulance, public transport or private vehicle) and/or a cellphone network presented serious problems if they needed to go to a hospital while pregnant.

Taking care of the sick at household level

Taking care of the sick at household level seemed to be the responsibility of both males and females in three villages; in Amarika the participants said that it was mostly the responsibility of the women (i.e. mainly the mothers). Participants said that when a child had to be taken to the hospital, the mother accompanied the child as it was too expensive for both parents to do so.

Violence

Physical violence between men and men and men and women was regarded as a serious problem across three of the sites; in Okapya it was said that *otombo* drinking and violence were not prevalent. Other stakeholder interviewees in the region also considered violence to be a major concern. Verbal and physical fights seemed to occur mostly when San people were drunk. Physical fights could be fist fights, knife fights and fights using other objects as weapons. Some said that violence was exacerbated by poverty and a lack of employment, for example one person may want to borrow money from another, the other might refuse and a fight would break out as a consequence.

“People even fight over *otombo*. One person can grab a glass of *otombo* from another because he is hungry or thirsty because he has no money to buy *otombo*, and this can cause a fight.”

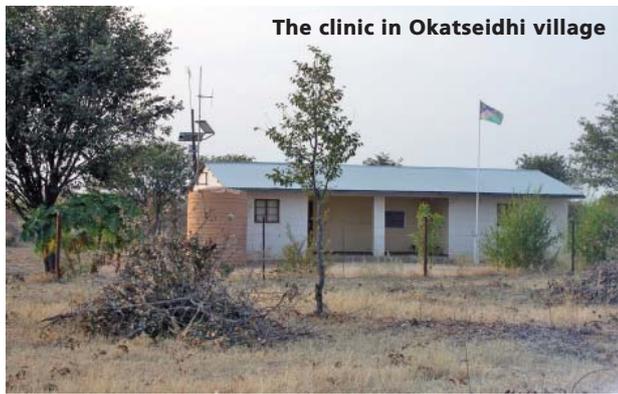
– Female participant in Amarika

Fights sometimes occurred at home, but most of the time they took place at shebeens. Fights at home occurred when there was no food to eat; spouses usually fought over money, especially when men spent their money at the shebeen.

Community institutional structures to deal with violence were absent in all four villages, therefore violence and disputes were dealt with by residents. Most village headmen seemed not to be actively involved in resolving conflicts or crises among San community members.

Access to health facilities

Two of the four villages had a clinic within the village boundaries, one used the clinic in another village about 3 km away, and people in the fourth village had to walk for 3-4 hours to reach the closest clinic. Most illnesses could thus be dealt with by the clinics – to the extent that they were equipped to deal with particular health problems. The challenge was accessing a hospital when people had more serious illnesses, due to distance and the lack of transportation. Ambulance services were not available at three of the villages; at Okapya an ambulance was sometimes available.



The clinic in Okatseidhi village



The clinic in Amarika village

Transport for seriously sick San people was a major challenge in Amarika, Okatseidhi and Okathakanguti. Okapya was close to the Oshikuku District Hospital, thus transport was not problematic. In Amarika, a lack of private or public transport was given as the reason for limited access to hospitals. In addition, if transport was available, the costs limited access to it. San in Amarika had to pay between N\$400 and N\$500 one way to be taken to the closest hospital using private transport. If such transport was unavailable or someone could not afford it, a donkey-cart or even a horse (if the person was physically strong) was used in Amarika. Participants reported that one sick person had died on a donkey-cart on the way to Okahao. Transport in Okatseidhi became more difficult during the rainy season because the main gravel road was usually flooded by rainwater. Another main challenge was the lack of cellphone networks in three of the four villages, preventing people from calling for help when in desperate need.

Cost of health services to the San

Government policy is that public health services must be accessible to all Namibians. Although payment is required in the form of a N\$4 fee for clinics and N\$9 for hospitals, certain exceptions are made. (Costs are higher for certain situations, e.g. it costs N\$20 to deliver a baby at the Oshikuku District Hospital and N\$20 to access the Onesi Hospital on weekends.) Vulnerable people such as OVC, pensioners and marginalised groups (e.g. the San) are supposed to be exempted from paying health facility fees as per a policy directive. However, none of the San in Omusati reported that they had been exempted from paying fees; rather they indicated that they could not afford to pay fees. On the other hand, some of the other stakeholder interviewees raised concerns that some San spent days at local shebeens purchasing *otombo*, and then did not have money for accessing health facilities. San people normally borrowed money from Owambo people when they desperately needed to visit the clinic and did not have the funds needed.

Traditional medicine

Participants in Okapya mentioned the use of traditional medicine (e.g. herbs from the bush) to treat some diseases. For example, they boiled eucalyptus leaves or the roots of the *ohama* tree to prepare a tea for coughing children. Reportedly, San did not visit traditional healers, and furthermore some participants noted that they had lost the knowledge of using traditional medicine.

External health support

Limited external health support was provided to the four communities, with only two reporting that they received health support – from the Namibia Red Cross Society (NRCS), Catholic Aids Action (CAA) and/or the Total Control of the Epidemic (TCE) programme. CAA trained community health workers to support communities and provide HIV/AIDS counselling, and TCE provided support with HIV testing and condom distribution.

8.4.7 Gender

As was found in Ohangwena Region, San men and women tended to have distinct tasks, but also shared some tasks. Tasks carried out primarily by females could also be carried out by males and vice versa (should such a need arise). Table 8.10 gives an indication of gender-specific tasks.

Table 8.10: Household tasks of San men and women in Omusati

Tasks undertaken by women	Tasks undertaken by men	Tasks undertaken by both
Fetching water	Herding livestock	Collecting veldfood
Collecting firewood for cooking; cooking; cleaning the house; doing the laundry	Piecework: herding livestock, collecting poles for house construction, working in crop fields	Looking after the sick
Looking after children	Working in crop fields	Taking care of sick children (but normally women accompanied sick children to health facilities)
Planting seeds, protecting crops		Harvesting
Piecework: domestic work, collecting thatching grass for house construction, working in crop fields		Piecework: working in crop fields

Unlike the participants in Ohangwena, San female participants in Omusati were more active than male participants across the four sites. Females were generally very assertive in making their voices heard in the discussions, and were not afraid to raise complicated issues. Younger females were especially assertive, whereas the younger males were less forthcoming. Women with a secondary education were more vocal and more assertive than those with lower levels of education. This could be an indication that higher levels of education contribute to women's emancipation from traditional or stereotypical gender roles.

The seating arrangements in the discussion meetings were such that women and men sat together, i.e. women and men did not sit in separate groups as they did in Ohangwena. However, in Okatseidhi, where women were especially outspoken, the men tended to be seated more towards the back of the participant group, and the women tended to be in the front.

In three of the four villages, inheritance was arranged on an equal basis, meaning that either a widow or a widower was left with household belongings and assets for continuing to make a living after the death of their spouse. Only in one village (Okapya) was it noted that on a husband's death, his family would inherit the cows, and the crop fields and household goods would be left to his wife and children – an arrangement also applying in Ohangwena. This arrangement is based on the perception that the husband is the owner of all household belongings and assets, thus important property belonging to him should revert to his family on his death.

Table 8.11: Inheritance arrangements in Omusati

Village	When a husband dies			When a wife dies		
	Wife and children inherit	Husband's family inherits	Both inherit	Husband and children inherit	Wife's family inherits	Both inherit
Okatseidhi						
Amarika						
Okathakanguti						
Okapya						

The cell shading indicates who inherits when a husband dies and when a wife dies at the applicable site.

8.4.8 Political participation and representation

Traditional authorities

The San and all other groups residing in the rural parts of Omusati Region abide by the leadership structures in their respective villages. As mentioned previously, three of the four villages visited were headed by San headmen under the respective Owambo traditional authority (TA) structures. Discussion participants indicated that having a San headman gave them an increased sense of belonging, self-confidence and the authority to speak for themselves. However, local politics resulted in San headmen not being respected by many Owambo residents as the rightful leaders of their villages. One of the villages (Okapya) was headed by an Owambo headman, but a San man had been the deputy until he passed away. In all villages the San populations were smaller than the Owambo populations (except in Amarika whose residents were mostly Ovakwakuti), but the villages were still headed mainly by San headmen. By contrast, none of the Ohangwena villages in which San resided were headed by San headmen.



Participants stated that San headmen attempted to solve village-related problems locally. The local traditional court was used in cases of theft and other crimes. When such problems could not be resolved locally, they were referred to senior headmen, all of whom were Owambo. If the problem could not be solved at this level, it was referred to the Deputy of the King, who consulted the King for a solution. If necessary, San headmen, like their Owambo counterparts, could consult directly with the King.

At village level, the traditional court is led by the village headman, who selects a small group of people who support him in hearing a disciplinary case. If this court finds an accused person guilty, it normally imposes a fine as punishment. If the guilty person does not pay the fine, the case is reported to the police and the civil courts, and normally bail is set for the person. Participants noted that Owambo people could easily afford to pay the bail instead of the fine – meaning that Owambo people under the jurisdiction of San headmen would rather pay bail than the fine levied by the traditional court. Participants also said that San found it difficult to attend court cases at civil courts because they are located at some distance from their villages, and this results in court cases between San and Owambo people being cancelled. Such circumstances could weaken the authority of local traditional courts and the authority of local San headmen.

San headmen found it extremely difficult to manage Owambo residents of the villages under their jurisdiction, especially the Owambo of Okatseidhi and Okathakanguti. In these two villages, it was said, Owambo residents continuously disregarded the authority of the San headmen, making the village administration extremely difficult for the headmen. Both of these headmen cited several examples of how Owambo residents showed their disrespect. The Okatseidhi San, including the village headman, felt hopeless and powerless under the Uukwaludhi people.

“The Uukwaludhi people undermine us, because our headman does not have a good house, education and cattle. The police comes here, and tells them that they must respect the headman, but as soon as the police leave, they continue to disrespect the headman. The nurse one day told the San headman, you go away from here, you are Kwangara, and you do not even know where the councillor’s office is.”

– Female participant in Okatseidhi

Participants in Okathakanguti said that many of the Owambo residents were actively campaigning to have the San headman replaced by an Owambo headman because apparently they did not want to be under the leadership of a San headman. When asked what could be done to address such instances of disrespect, the San participants said that they could not do anything because the Owambo people were more powerful in terms of wealth and local politics. It was reported that San headmen were treated with disrespect specifically because of their ethnic origin, and Owambo people did not feel comfortable living under a San headman. The San had tried several different strategies in the past, but nothing had changed. For instance, in Okatseidhi the King had personally instructed the Uukwaludhi people to respect the San headman, but this had not brought about the desired results.

In general, participants noted that for someone to become a village headman, he would have to have certain characteristics, such as respect for others, good relations with people, good manners and trustworthiness. Ethnicity or political affiliations were not regarded as important factors. However, San participants could not imagine a San woman becoming a headwoman; in Amarika it was said to be against cultural practices for a woman to be head of a village (and a non-Ovakwakuti could not be a headman of Amarika either). According to participants across all four sites, a village leader must be:

- someone who can think;
- someone who has respect for the community and is respected by the community in turn;
- someone who provides feedback in and after meetings;
- someone honest;
- someone possessing good manners; and
- someone who can be relied upon to display responsible behaviour.

Public participation and consultation

Most San participants were not aware of national bodies established to support San communities and individuals, such as the SDP of the OPM, and NGOs representing the interests of the San, such as the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA). San people in Omusati were represented by the Omusati Regional Council at both the national and regional levels – as residents of the region, not specifically as a marginalised group.

Visits by regional representatives to villages in which San resided were said to be ad hoc, irregular and infrequent. Development projects in villages did not usually target San specifically, but there were exceptions – for example, the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister had visited Okatseidhi to hear for himself about community challenges and needs. This resulted in the San community receiving four donkeys and two ploughs from the SDP, which, according to participants, were later used mostly by Owambo residents of the village instead. In some cases, it was reported, government officials visited villages to inform the San and fellow villagers about forthcoming projects which had been planned without prior consultation. In other cases, government had promised certain projects which had never materialised, such as the enlargement of the local clinic in Okatseidhi. Some communities were last visited three years before our field research, and members of these communities reported feeling neglected by the government. However, there were also positive perceptions relating to consultations which had resulted in government support, e.g. the desalination plant in Amarika. Amarika participants noted that they had informed their councillor about the salty water in the area, and this was followed by further discussions between the councillor and development partners, which resulted in the construction of the desalination plant.



Participants at all four sites asked for more consultations with government and other developmental partners. The main issues they wanted to tackle in a thorough consultation process were: education; employment; food security; housing; national documentation (e.g. birth certificates); democratic elections of leaders; clean water; violence; and respect for San inhabitants.

Community meetings in all four villages were normally attended by both San and non-San residents. In Okatseidhi, San participants complained that their views and opinions – including those articulated by the San headman – were not taken seriously in such meetings.

“We talk in such meetings, but no one take our words seriously. They just tell us, you Kwangara, be quiet, we understand what you are saying.”

– Female participant in Okatseidhi

Representation of the San in decision-making structures differed considerably across the four villages. The San headmen in three villages had members of the community supporting them in decision making. The most community influence on decision making took place in Amarika, where the Ovakwakuti residents were in the majority. There, decisions were made by Ovakwakuti sitting on different bodies such as the traditional court, school development committee, traditional council, village development committee and church committee. The pastor of the ELCIN Church was an Ovakwakuti woman who concurrently served as secretary to the Ovakwakuti headman. Interestingly, the Amarika participants were the only ones aware of the Otamanzi Constituency Development Committee (CDC), noting that two Ovakwakuti people sat on the CDC. By contrast, in Okapya the headman was Owambo and there were no San elected to the headman’s committee, thus the San residents’ influence on decision making was very limited.

There were water point committees (WPCs) in Okatseidhi, Okapya and Amarika, but not in Okathakanguti (because there was no water point in this village). Most of the WPC members in Okatseidhi were Uukwaludhi, while one San man was responsible for opening and closing the tap and a San woman was the secretary. WPC members who attended study discussions in Okatseidhi noted that San members of the WPC actively participated in the committee and their views were taken into consideration, just like anyone else’s. In Amarika all WPC members were Ovakwakuti, and in Okapya no San sat on the WPC due to the social exclusion of San in the village.

A water well at Ombome B used by San of Okathakanguti village



The Roman Catholic Church had a women's group in Okapya, with three San members. The group was led by a steering committee which included a San representative. The Church also initiated a community health committee in Okapya, with two San members.

When in need of help to solve a problem, the San in the four villages would normally approach their respective headmen, who would help as far as possible. If they could not solve the problem, the headmen approached constituency councillors for help.

8.4.9 Human rights awareness

Participants found it difficult to talk about human rights. However, they identified the following rights that they have as citizens of Namibia:

- the right to be treated equally based on gender;
- the right to a job;
- the right to own land (“... right to say that this is our land and not for the Uukwaludhi people.”);
- the right to own property; and
- the right to move around.

Some participants felt that the following rights were withheld from them:

- the right to employment;
- the right to receive vital national documentation;
- the right to education; and
- the right to communication.

Participants were unaware of international instruments dealing with indigenous people. They were also unaware of national policies/programmes aimed at marginalised people.

In summary, public participation in Omusati Region was found to be stronger than in Ohangwena Region. This was due to the San representation in the TA structures (three sites) and their relatively higher levels of education compared with Ohangwena levels. Nevertheless, the San in Omusati still felt that the Owambo people treated them as inferiors and discriminated against them.

8.4.10 Changes over time and visions for the future

Changes over time

The participants at all four sites regarded the years just before Independence (i.e. the 1980s) as the worst years, because of the war and the violence taking place in Omusati Region at the time. Furthermore, due to the war, movement of people was restricted, food production was destroyed, access to social facilities was limited and food supplies were low. Conversely, the years just after Independence were regarded as the best years in terms of quality of life because at Independence the torturing and killing of people by soldiers stopped; children could go to school; crop field fences

were no longer destroyed by army vehicles; there were sufficient supplies of food (including food aid from government); pensions were given to old people; and clinics and schools were built.¹¹ It was only in Okapya that the quality of life did not improve immediately after Independence; this was due to heavy flooding resulting in the inability of the community to cultivate crops and access social services. Most participants in three of the villages also agreed that the quality of life in 2012 was more or less as good as it had been at Independence, for the following reasons: San households had access to potable water, clinics, primary schools and churches; San were headmen of villages; pensions were being provided; and in some cases food for work was available.

Although previous sections of this regional chapter detail challenges that San were experiencing in Omusati Region, the participants felt that their quality of life was by and large good in 2012; only participants in Okatseidhi were not happy with their quality of life in 2012. Their main concerns throughout the discussions were: perceived discrimination against the San by Owambo people; perceived undermining of their headmen; and the continuous influx of Owambo people into their village. One male respondent said, “We are being colonised by the Uukwaludhi people.”

Visions for the future

When asked, “What would you like your life to look like in the future?”, a participant in Okatseidhi said, “I want an independent normal standard of life. I want Independence to come to my village.” Participants in all four villages envisioned better lives for themselves and their children in relation to food supplies, education, health and certain material commodities, but the strategies identified for achieving this vision varied from village to village. In sum, Okatseidhi and Amarika participants recommended capacity-building and empowerment strategies that would enable the San to move towards self-reliance and independence, whereas those in the other two villages mainly recommended the provision of material support – a strategy which, the researchers fear, runs the risk of deepening San dependency on outside support. Table 8.12 summarises the strategies recommended.

Table 8.12: San recommendations for improving their quality of life in Omusati

Okatseidhi and Amarika			Okathakanguti and Okapya
For children	For adults (age 18+)	For elderly people	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good education ● Knowledge about HIV and AIDS ● Employment when they finish school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blankets ● Mattresses ● Food ● Warm clothing ● Proper housing ● Pension when eligible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Borehole ● School ● Fences ● Donkeys ● Ploughs ● Clinic ● Tractors ● Payment of hostel fees ● Blankets ● Electricity

The participants in Okatseidhi and Amarika stressed that they needed good education for their children, employment for the adults, and basic necessities for elderly people who could no longer work. This is evidence of communities not asking for handouts, but rather seeking opportunities for moving towards self-reliance. The strategies recommended for children were clearly aimed at empowering children to contribute to the improvement of their own lives, thereby decreasing their dependency on external support. Strategies for elderly people were different as they addressed their immediate needs in the form of material support that would make the lives of elderly people more comfortable, taking into consideration the fact that they can no longer do hard work.

¹¹ Interestingly, in one village it was said that shebeens established after Independence increased the quality of life.

In contrast, the San in Okathakanguti and Okapya wanted government to provide the material support listed in Table 8.12; in fact they had already requested this support. Although in principle this support could also decrease dependency, the manner in which these villages had requested the support suggested that the “we do it ourselves” philosophy of the first two villages was lacking.

All four communities hoped that their lives would improve, but their hopes were based entirely on the implementation of their recommended strategies – which would largely entail external support.

8.5 Conclusions and recommendations

8.5.1 Conclusions

Livelihood strategies

The main livelihood strategies of the San in Omusati Region were subsistence crop production, piecework and veldfood gathering. Other sources of income were government social grants (Old Age Pension, War Veteran Pension and OVC grants), sales of self-made crafts and ownership of small businesses (e.g. shebeens). On the whole, the San in Omusati were more self-reliant than those in Ohangwena Region. According to the discussion participants in Omusati, formal employment opportunities for San were extremely limited, mainly because of their lack of education and the perceived discrimination and favouritism militating against their employment.

Food security

In comparison to the San in Ohangwena (and perhaps other regions), those in Omusati had a wider variety of food available to them, although in insufficient quantities. The main crops cultivated by San in Omusati were *omahangu*, maize, sorghum, beans, groundnuts and watermelon. San in Okathakanguti village accessed vegetables from the Etunda Irrigation Scheme in exchange for casual labour. Across the four Omusati research sites, veldfood gathering had reduced significantly due to the high influx of people.

The extent of alcohol abuse is an issue requiring further attention. Participants reported that almost all people (males, females and children) drank *otombo* on a daily basis. This drinking of alcoholic beverages potentially holds serious negative consequences for physical and mental wellbeing, especially because of its impacts on children’s growth and development.

Wealth status

Most of the households (almost 80%) regarded themselves as ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’, mainly because of a lack of formal employment opportunities, limited livestock, no fences around their crop fields, no pension grants for the eligible elderly, limited education facilities other than primary schools, and no local business opportunities. Some of the San (15%) were regarded as ‘rich’ and ‘very rich’ because they received War Veteran Pensions, had crop fields with fences, owned a few livestock or owned shebeens. Pensions represented the only opportunity for people to become upwardly socially mobile. The causes of poverty were said to be a lack of education and employment opportunities for the San, coupled with a lack of agricultural tools and draught-animal power.

San generally perceived themselves as being worse off than their Owambo neighbours. Factors included a lack of employment opportunities, discrimination against San, a lack of secondary schools close by and/or a lack of social networks outside the villages, which meant that San children attending secondary school had to live with people from other ethnic groups.

Land issues

Village headmen allocated land within the villages to San, which involved some financial costs. This allocation of land provided San with a sense of pride and security, which the San in Ohangwena, for example, did not have. A few San, especially in Amarika, could not afford to pay the headman the fee requested for land to be allocated to them. San headmen were appointed and recognised as the legitimate administrators of the land over which they presided.

Identity, culture and heritage

Our study found that in Omusati the San were perceived as comprising an underclass as opposed to an ethnic group, and cultural and linguistic markers were clearly diminishing. None of the San across the four participating villages could speak a San language, and many had adopted specific aspects of the neighbouring cultures. Nevertheless, the terms used for referring to them, such as *Kwangara* and *Ayelele*, clearly indicated that there was a perceived difference between them and their Owambo neighbours. They felt disadvantaged in comparison to their Owambo neighbours, and discriminated against by them.

Relationships with other groups

San relationships with Owambo neighbours could be categorised as employer-employee, sexual partners, spouses, fellow villagers, fellow drinkers and fellow committee members. San households called on Owambo households for the provision of piecework when in need of support. However, unequal power relations between the two groups had problematised relationships; in particular, unequal opportunities for employment and disrespect towards San headmen had created serious tensions between the two groups. Many San reported that many Owambo people treated them as subordinates, or as people who cannot take care of themselves ('Kwangaras').

Education

San parents regarded education as essential – mainly as a step towards a better future for their children, and ultimately so that offspring might support San families and contribute to alleviating poverty. Most San parents ensured that their children enrolled in primary school, and most of the children completed primary school, but very few completed secondary school. Distances to secondary schools, the limited number of secondary schools, bullying, a lack of funds, teenage pregnancy and child labour were the main reasons for San children dropping out of school.

Health

The most serious illnesses experienced across the four sites were TB, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and diarrhoea. The main illnesses for children were malaria, diarrhoea, chicken pox, mental health problems, epilepsy, toothache and body sores. Malnutrition among children was not mentioned as a concern, and almost all San children were vaccinated. Distance to health facilities was a serious concern at two sites, and San were expected to pay for public health services, which many were unable to do. External health support was minimal and limited to support from the NRCS, CAA and/or TCE.

Traditional authorities

Three of the four participating villages were headed by San headmen, and the fourth by an Owambo headman. San headmen in villages with an Owambo majority found it difficult to carry out their headman duties due to Owambo residents' alleged disrespect for their authority. All San preferred to be under the leadership jurisdiction of San headmen, and they respected the current leadership.

Having San as headmen played a big role in the manner in which decisions were made, as more San were part of decision-making bodies – in notable contrast to Ohangwena where such participation was severely lacking. San community members under San headmen were also more actively involved in community activities, and had more confidence to stand up for their rights. They spoke with authority in meetings, ensuring that their voices were heard. However, challenges remained with implementing San recommendations/suggestions in villages with more Owambo than San residents.

Public participation

San in Omusati participated actively in decision making at village level, but not at regional and national levels. San discussion participants were not aware of national bodies that represented them, and had no regional-level representation either – San were treated the same as all other groups at regional level and no specific provision was made for them as a marginalised group. This has contributed to their not receiving the government support that they need.

Visions for the future

All participants hoped that their lives would change for the better in the future. They indicated that such change would come about with community members working hard, combined with external support. Lessons learned in other regions (e.g. Ohangwena) showed that external support needs to be provided in such a manner that it enables communities to become self-reliant and does not increase dependency on outside support. Capacity-building support such as better-quality education, better access to educational facilities (including tertiary education), and better and equal employment opportunities would enable beneficiaries to take care of themselves. On the other hand, it has been proven that handouts tend to increase dependency.

8.5.2 Recommendations

The situation of the San in Omusati is unique due to the extent to which they have integrated into dominant regional cultures and the resultant changes over time in livelihood strategies, traditional structures, cultural practices, education levels, and knowledge of health issues and other issues. Although many cultural practices have been lost, the San were still a highly marginalised group in this region, thus affording them the same choices and opportunities as their Owambo neighbours requires giving them special attention. Our findings in Omusati lead us to recommend the following.

Firstly, government and development partners should intensify support for education, especially by making upper primary, secondary and tertiary education more accessible to the San in the region. It is acknowledged that other groups living in the same villages have similar educational challenges as the San, but the situation of the San is exacerbated by their having less-extensive social networks (e.g. for accommodating children attending secondary school). The issue of long distances between homes and schools needs urgent attention, especially for upper primary and secondary schools.

Secondly, affirmative action in formal employment provision should be encouraged and implemented with a view to employing more San than is currently the case. Special employment programmes need to be developed for San to be absorbed into the overall work environment, until such time as the unequal distribution of jobs has been addressed satisfactorily.

Thirdly, support should be provided to enable elderly people who cannot take care of themselves to access daily necessities to continue to live a dignified life. Government should ensure that the San get national documents to facilitate their registration for social grants, as appropriate. Special attention is needed in relation to food support, blankets, clothing, shoes and transportation to health facilities.

Implementing three main recommendations above will better equip San children for their adult lives; help adults to take care of their families; and support those elderly people who cannot take care of themselves. It is assumed that if San are better educated and employed, the current unequal power relations will fade away – an additional benefit besides those accompanying better education and employment. The recommendations above are geared towards long-term sustainable livelihoods.

In the interim, the following initiatives are needed to support the poor and very poor San (and other ethnic groups, where relevant):

- Provision of agricultural equipment to poor and very poor residents.
- Provision of materials to fence agricultural fields.
- A widespread awareness campaign to inform San of their human rights, including their rights as an indigenous people.
- An in-depth study on alcohol abuse among the San in Omusati (in particular the practice of feeding alcohol to children) and on possible prevention measures.
- Owambo TAs need to give special attention to the manner in which Owambo residents treat San headmen. Disciplinary actions need to be applied to those who do not respect village headmen.
- Strengthening of village, constituency and regional institutional structures to increase public participation by San at these levels. This needs to be a bottom-up, coordinated approach.