

# Chapter 9

## Kavango Region

By **Maarit Thiem** and **Brian T. Jones**

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**Note:** At the time of editing this report in August 2013, Kavango Region was split to form two regions: Kavango East and Kavango West. As all of our research was conducted before this development, we have retained all references to a single Kavango Region.

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San housing in Xeidang village, Kavango Region



### 9.1 General background

Kavango Region is situated in north-eastern Namibia, bordering Angola to the north. The region, covering an area of about 48 456 km<sup>2</sup>, has nine constituencies: Kahenge, Kapako, Mashare, Mpungu, Mukwe, Ndyona, Rundu Rural East, Rundu Rural West and Rundu Urban. As most of Mukwe Constituency lies within the boundaries of the Bwabwata National Park (Chapter 10), Mukwe is not covered in this chapter on Kavango Region.

The administrative centre of Kavango Region is the town of Rundu, situated on the Okavango River. Slightly less than half of Kavango's land area is available for communal farming, and the remaining areas are used for various purposes, particularly commercial farming and conservation (Brown 2010: 28).



The 2011 census counted 36 741 households in Kavango. The average household size is 6.0 persons, which is the highest total number of people living in one household in Namibia. Of all Kavango households, 57% are headed by males and 43% by females, both figures being close to the national averages. The overall literacy rate for Kavango is 79% of the population over 15, which is below the national average of 89% (NSA 2013: 13; 8).

Urbanisation is taking place, and Rundu's population has grown from 36 964 in 2001 to nearly 63 431 in 2011 (NSA) 2013:39).

Rukavango-speaking people constitute by far the largest language group in Kavango (79.4% of the population), and San constitute just 0.4% of the region's population (NSA 2013: 171).

Most of the region's inhabitants are engaged in some form of agricultural production, primarily small-scale farming of *mahangu* (pearl millet) on a few hectares, with small numbers of goats and cattle. Recently, however, most of the southern and western parts of the region have been divided into what are designated as "Small-scale Commercial Farms" (SSCFs), most of which are 2 500 hectares in size (Brown 2010: 25; Mendelsohn and El Obeid 2003: 92ff). These farms have been allocated to individuals under a leasehold system. However, most of the crop-growing activities on these farms generate little income because fields are small, soils have limited fertility, yields are low, surplus harvests are rare, and markets are small (Brown 2010: 25). Livelihoods are thus considerably diversified, with residents relying also on wages and salaries, pensions and cash remittances. According to (Brown 2010: 25), small-scale *mahangu* farms provide some food self-sufficiency but little food security – and no opportunities for economic development or poverty reduction.

Livestock provide an important source of draught power for cultivation, meat and milk. Perhaps more importantly, the household cattle herd is regarded as a form of savings (NPC 2007c: 9-10). According to the NSA, cattle and poultry are the most important assets in terms of livestock (NSA 2013: 109). Fish are an important source of protein for people living close to the Okavango River. Fish populations in this river have always been low because the river is naturally very low in nutrients, but it is widely agreed that fish populations have dropped to even lower levels because of overfishing (Brown 2010: 30).

About 70% of Kavango's population live within a 10 km-wide ribbon along the river. This is where people first settled due to the availability of water and the suitability of the soils and pastures for farming. Settlements have developed to the south of the river, but living conditions in small, remote villages away from the river and main roads are difficult. Here people are far from services and their opportunities to participate in the region's retail and cash economy are limited (Brown 2010: 22).

Kavango is one of the poorest regions in Namibia, and this is clearly reflected in various reports and surveys. According to a Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)<sup>2</sup> analysis of poverty data, the highest incidence of poverty in Namibia is in Kavango Region, where 56.5% are poor and 36.7% are severely poor (CBS 2008: 9).<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) underscores that of Namibia's 13 regions,<sup>4</sup> Kavango had the second worst life expectancy

<sup>2</sup> In 2011 the CBS was replaced by the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA), established by the Statistics Act 9 of 2011. The NSA is an independent state institution which reports to the National Planning Commission (NPC).

<sup>3</sup> The CBS in the NPC assessed poverty levels in Namibia by using a poverty line in terms of which 'poor' households were those whose monthly expenditure was less than N\$262,45 per adult, and 'severely poor' households were those whose monthly expenditure was less than N\$184,56 per adult (CBS 2008: 3).

<sup>4</sup> Fourteen as of August 2013 when Kavango Region was split into two: Kavango East and Kavango West.

at birth, the third worst literacy rate, the sixth worst gross school enrolment ratio and the second lowest annual average per capita income in 2001. As a result, Kavango Region had the second lowest HDI (0.410) for Namibia after Ohangwena Region (Levine 2007: 14).

In addition, according to the UNDP's Human Poverty Index (HPI), of the 13 regions, people in Kavango had the fourth highest probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, the third highest illiteracy rate, and the second highest share of the population in households that spent more than 60% of total income on food (Levine 2007: 10). As a result Kavango, along with Omusati and Oshikoto Regions, had the highest HPI ranking (45) of the 13 regions (Levine 2007: 11).

The provision of services – such as water, transport networks, telephones, education and health – has improved significantly in Kavango during the past 15 years (Brown 2010: 31). In 2010 there were about 335 schools in the region, and 42 clinics, 9 health centres and 4 hospitals. Roads have been upgraded and tarred; cellphone coverage is available in the most densely populated areas; electricity supplies have been expanded greatly; and retail services are much more widely available than before. Nevertheless, people living deep in the interior of the region are far from these services, thus access to education and medical treatment is difficult. The Okavango River is the main source of water for the people living along the river, and for their livestock, whereas inland villages depend entirely on groundwater from boreholes and in some cases from seasonal pans.

## 9.2 The San in Kavango Region

Historians generally concur that San people have been living in what is now Kavango Region for thousands of years (Mendelsohn and El Obeid 2003: 35). There are different opinions as to when the various Kavango ethnic groups settled in the region, with estimates including the 1500s and late 1700s/early 1800s, but there is evidence that crop farmers have lived along the river for over 1 100 years. Contact between San and Kavango peoples intensified after 1950, when a growing population forced Kwangali<sup>5</sup> people to move from the river south to the Mpungu area. Before that time the Kavango tended to use the area south of the Okavango River only seasonally (Cole 1999: 13). Before the Kwangali started to move permanently to the Mpungu area, the !Xun San moved periodically towards the river and worked for Kwangali farmers in return for food (Gordon and Douglas 2000: 125).

Suzman reports that by Independence the majority of the San were dependent on Kavango farmers. The number of San in the area was reduced in the late 1970s and early '80s when the South African Defence Force (SADF) started to remove them to Western Bushmanland. After Independence some of the resettled families returned to Kavango Region (Suzman 2001b: 36-37).

The !Xun are the main San group in Kavango Region, and live mainly in the south-west of the region around the Mpunguveld. Other groups live in small villages east of Rundu across to Andara. In addition to the !Xun, small numbers of Hai||om and Khwe San live scattered throughout the region, and small numbers of Ju|'hoansi live near Khaudum and Samagaigai (Suzman 2001b: 36). Other San groups in the region include the Khwe and !Xun communities living within the Bwabwata National Park (see Chapter 10).

The data gathered from our research sites, as well as the information given above, indicate that the San are still widely distributed in Kavango Region. There are groups of San living in and around

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<sup>5</sup> The Kwangali people are a sub-group of the Kavango people, and their language, Rukwangali, is the most widely spoken language in Kavango Region today – effectively the region's *lingua franca*.

urban areas such as Rundu and Nkurenkuru, and other groups live in small villages of their own, and in small numbers around many villages inhabited mainly by Kavango people.

The 2001 national census found 2 277 people speaking a San language at home in Kavango Region. Table 9.1 provides an overview of the number of San people per constituency, based on the 2001 census figures.

**Table 9.1: San population of Kavango Region according to national census data, 2001**

Constituency	Number of individuals speaking a San language at home	Percentage within the constituency
Kahenge	159	0.5%
Kapako	182	0.7%
Mashare	141	0.9%
Mpungu	538	2.9%
Mukwe	1 001	3.8%
Ndyona	56	0.3%
Rundu Rural West	147	0.6%
Rundu Urban	53	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 277</b>	<b>1,3%</b>

Sources: "Population and Housing Census 2001: Kavango Regional Profile" (NPC 2001b) and authors' own calculations

Remarkably, the census of 2011 found that the proportion of San-speaking households in Kavango had decreased to 0.4% (NSA 2013: 171).



**Focus group discussion participants in Wiwi village**

## 9.3 Research sites in Kavango Region

This section introduces the four research sites in Kavango Region: Likwaterera; Wiwi; Xeidang and Ndama. Table 9.2 summarises the main characteristics of these sites. The sites selected for the research in Kavango cover the spectrum from remote rural to peri-urban communities, and also represent different types of land tenure.

**Table 9.2: The main characteristics of the Kavango Region research sites**

Research site*	Urban/rural status	Land tenure	San language groups	Population status (numerical)	Institutional support	
					GRN	NGOs
Likwaterera	Rural	Resettlement village on communal land	!Xun and Ju 'hoansi	Minority in a Shambyu community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional Councillor</li> <li>OPM</li> </ul>	None reported
Wiwi	Remote rural	Village on communal land	!Xun	Majority with Nyemba, Kwangali and Owambo minorities	None reported beyond normal GRN rural services	None reported
Xeidang	Remote rural	Village incorporated into small-scale commercial farm	Ju 'hoansi	Majority	None reported beyond normal GRN rural services	None reported
Ndama	Peri-urban	Townland – neighbourhood of Rundu	!Xun	Minority among various ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MGECW</li> <li>Constituency Office</li> </ul>	Catholic Aids Action

\* All of the research sites are in Kavango East Region.

### 9.3.1 Likwaterera

Likwaterera village is in Rundu Rural West Constituency, and is located about 40 km south-east of Rundu along a new gravel road going south just beyond the Rundu municipal boundary (see map on page 330). The village is populated mainly by Shambyu people. In 2010, 140-160 San people were moved to Likwaterera from other villages closer to the river: 12 San families came from Mazana village and 8 families came from Kamboho village; the number of people per household ranged from 4 to 16.

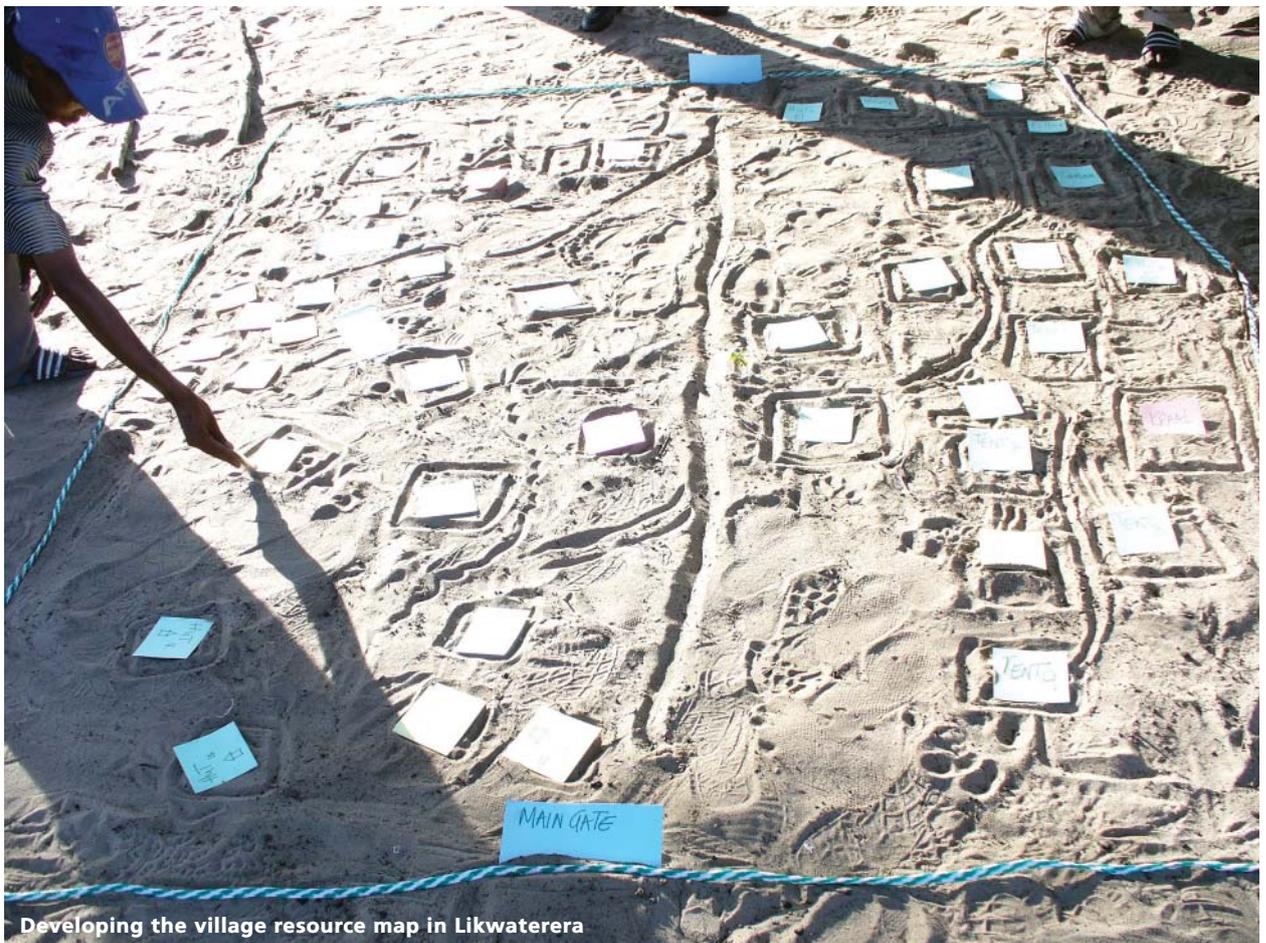
The San of Likwaterera are living in a 20 ha compound which has been fenced off to keep their livestock within the compound – i.e. to prevent them from wandering into neighbouring fields. However, between the time that the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) erected the fence and the time of our field research, some of the cattle had died. There was no water within the compound, so the San collected water from a water point in the main village. There was no clinic in the village area, and focus group discussion (FGD) participants said that a mobile clinic visited only irregularly. There was a kindergarten within the fenced area, but a part of this building was still being constructed at the time of our visit, and the kindergarten was not functioning at the time, reportedly because the kindergarten teacher had not been paid by the OPM. There was a primary school in the main village (i.e. outside the fenced area). The San at this site were dependent mainly on piecework and Old Age Pensions for cash. A few people cultivated fields, but most were dependent on government food aid and purchasing or bartering for *mahangu* or mealie-meal. Gathering veldfood was important when there was insufficient food in a household and few opportunities to earn cash.

The San name for Likwaterera is *Gcedang*, meaning ‘many hyenas’. Some FGD participants identified themselves as Ju|'hoansi, and we were told there were also !Xun among the families in the fenced

area. FGD participants said that San people were among the original inhabitants of the Likwaterera area, but they were unable to provide any indication of the period of San habitation there; they only said that their forefathers had lived in the area “a long time ago”, but had moved around in pursuit of water and to hunt, and had finally moved away from the area.

Regarding their identity, some FGD participants did not like to be called “San”, and others had no objection to this word. They did not know where the name “San” had come from, but some said that it was “white people” who initiated the use of this name in the area. They said that their forefathers had not been happy with the term “Bushman”: today they no longer lived in the bush, “so why the name Bushman?”

The two groups of families living in the compound had been moved there by the Kavango Regional Council in 2010, with the Rundu Rural East Constituency Councillor overseeing the move. In our interview with the Councillor, he explained that the aim of the relocation was to help the people to change their lifestyle and to move into crop cultivation and livestock farming. He indicated that it had taken him about two years to convince the San to relocate, and he had told them that if they moved, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) would support them. Some of the San did not want to be moved because, he said, “As you know these people are different from us; they just want to continue with their nomadic lifestyles,” but he had wanted the San to move to a single site so that the government could support them as it had done at other resettlement projects for the San. The government provided transport for the people to move to Likwaterera, as well as the fence for the compound, large tents for shelter (in which some of the San were still living at the time of our visit), a small number of cattle, and a 12.5 kg bag of maize-meal and some canned fish for each resettled person.



### 9.3.2 Wiwi

Wiwi village lies in Mpungu Constituency, about 30 km south-west of Mpungu in the Kwangali traditional area. Most of the village residents are San (seven main households), and their neighbours are Kwangali, Nyemba and Owambo. The San of Wiwi are in fact living on Kwangali communal land; the Kwangali Traditional Authority (TA) had given them permission to settle there. At the time of our visit, Wiwi had a borehole with a diesel pump, as well as a kindergarten and a primary school catering for Grades 1-4 – whereafter learners would go to school in Mpungu. The nearest clinic was in Mpungu, but children in the village were served by a mobile clinic which visited the village every two months specifically to treat children. There was a veterinary kraal at the village, but the San did not use it as they had no cattle. The main livelihood strategies of the San in Wiwi were piecework, veldfood gathering and Old Age Pension money. The San also received food aid from the government. Only one person had a crop field.

The San in Wiwi identified themselves as !Xun, which means ‘human being’. They said that “white people” had given them the name “San”. Many people had names adopted from neighbouring ethnic groups, but FGD participants said that they still retained and used their !Xun names. They had originally left Mpoto village (in the same constituency) because of Namibia’s war for independence, and had settled in Gode village (which is close to Wiwi). There were still three !Xun homesteads in Gode (including that of the headman), but most people had moved to Wiwi from Gode as there was no water in Gode. Some people said that they could never leave Wiwi because this was their land.

FGD participants said that the SADF took many !Xun from the Wiwi area to Bushmanland during the war, and forcibly took other !Xun to South Africa. At the time, they were unhappy about the community being split up in this manner, and they remained unhappy as they had never again seen the people who were taken to Bushmanland and South Africa.



Developing the village resource map in Wiwi

### 9.3.3 Xeidang

Xeidang is a small, remote village located deep in the bush in Mashare Constituency, about 60 km south of Taratara and about 30 km west of the Khaudum National Park. The village is located on land that has been incorporated into a small-scale commercial farm (SSCF) which the Shambyu TA allocated to an individual farmer (who was still waiting for the communal land board to grant him a lease for the land). There were about 50 San residents of the village, most of whom were related to each other. (The same number of San in Xeidang were registered with the Mashare Constituency Office for the food aid programme.)

Water was available from a borehole provided by the South African Government through the South West Africa Administration. The hand pump used in the past to draw the water from this borehole had been replaced by a diesel pump belonging to the farmer, but villagers said that they now had a problem accessing the water because the farmer sometimes stopped the diesel engine, and he also stopped them digging into the ground to reach the water. There was no school at the village, and the nearest school (catering for Grades 1-6) was at Taratara, about 60 km away. The nearest clinic was at Baramasoni, about 75 km away, and FGD participants reported that a mobile clinic visited the village only irregularly. Since people who might wish to avail themselves of the mobile clinic were often out in the bush when it arrived, it was not always possible for the health workers to attend to all those requiring healthcare services during a single visit.

The main livelihood strategies of the Ju|'hoansi in Xeidang were piecework, veldfood gathering and Old Age Pension money. They also received food aid from the government. One man had some livestock, and some men hunted springhares for food. Several people had small gardens for growing vegetables and maize.

The San of Xeidang identified themselves as Ju|'hoansi, and said that they had lived at Xeidang for a very long time – since before Independence. Their parents and grandparents had always moved through the area, but then later discovered good water points at Xeidang so they decided to settle there permanently. They were emphatic that they had been living at Xeidang in colonial times, and said, “This is our place!” The Shambyu TA had asked the Ju|'hoansi of Xeidang if they would vacate the village and move to an area near Taratara because Xeidang had been allocated as an individual farm. By the time of writing, the Ju|'hoansi had not agreed to move (see section 9.4.2 on access to land).

### 9.3.4 Ndama neighbourhood, Rundu

Ndama is a small peri-urban neighbourhood, located on the outskirts of the town of Rundu in Rundu Rural West Constituency. The research was carried out on the southern edge of Ndama where a group of San were living together, about 1.3 km south of Ndama Primary School. Ndama's inhabitants included San and other ethnic groups, but all of the FGD participants were !Xun.

The Shambyu TA had given the !Xun of Ndama permission to stay there, and allegedly the Rundu Town Council had allocated land to them. Subsequently the !Xun had allowed non-San people to move in and settle there too. It was said that the first occupants of the land were entitled to allocate it to newcomers at a fee, but the legal basis for such transactions was unclear and was not clarified in any research discussion in Kavango.

The FGD participants indicated that they accessed their water at Ndama Primary School. They explained that they had helped to clear the forest when the school was being established, and



San housing in Ndama neighbourhood, Rundu

thenceforth had been allowed to fetch water and wash their clothes there. Even though the taps for the pre-paid system were closer to their homes, the school principal had continued to allow them to fetch water from the school because the San could not afford to pay for the pre-paid water. There was a clinic nearby for healthcare services, and if there was a serious problem, patients went to the Rundu State Hospital. There was no electricity supply where the San lived in Ndama, but other parts of the neighbourhood did have an electricity supply. San children attended Ndama Primary School, which FGD participants said was originally established for the San. At the outset the school had a San teacher, but not anymore.

The Ndama community received different types of support from the government. In 2009 the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGE CW) provided shoes for elderly people, and reportedly paid school fees for some San children. The Constituency Office helped the San of Ndama to start a butchery project, but the project failed (details provided further on). The community had also been visited by health workers from the New Start HIV/AIDS programme and Catholic Aids Action (a Namibian NGO).

The !Xun in Ndama derived their livelihoods mainly from the Old Age Pension, veldfood and piecework. They had comparatively more opportunities than San in other areas of Kavango to find piecework due to their close proximity to the town of Rundu. In addition they sold firewood and crafts (e.g. bows and arrows, baskets etc.).

Most of the !Xun in Ndama had moved there from other places in Kavango. The FGD participants said that the advantages of living in Ndama were the easier access to piecework, the closer proximity to the hospital and the availability of water at the school. They had previously lived closer to the school, but had moved to the southern edge of Ndama in 2000 because it was very noisy close to the school. They had named the part of Ndama where they now lived *Musive Dundu zo Mundu* (no translation provided). They mentioned that there were other people from their own San group living in different parts of Ndama, and they saw each other as one family but living in different places.

## 9.4 Research findings

### 9.4.1 Livelihoods and poverty

This subsection looks at the various livelihood strategies employed at the four sites in Kavango. We begin with an analysis of the livelihood options available to the San at each site, and then discuss the food security of the San in Kavango, and then examine the perceptions of poverty at each site.

#### *Livelihood strategies*

Table 9.3 indicates that the San in Kavango derive their livelihoods mainly from government food aid (mostly mealie-meal), Old Age Pensions, income from piecework, and gathering veldfood. This table also shows that, compared to Likwaterera, Wiwi and Xeidang, Ndama, as a peri-urban neighbourhood adjacent to the region's main town, offers a wider range of livelihood options that can generate cash – mainly opportunities to draw a small income from selling crafts and firewood. In Xeidang the gardens were regarded as important because the harvests normally lasted for about three months.

**Table 9.3: Main livelihood strategies at the Kavango Region research sites\***

Livelihood strategies	Likwaterera	Wiwi	Xeidang	Ndama
Old Age Pension				
Food aid				
Piecework				
Veldfood				
Crop fields				
Vegetable gardens				
Bartering veldfood for maize-meal				
Hunting springhares				
Selling chicken				
Selling crafts				
Selling firewood				

\* The order in which the strategies are presented does not necessarily reflect their importance. The cell shading indicates that the strategy is employed at the applicable site.

#### **Food aid**

Food aid appears to be important for ensuring that San do not starve: the supply of maize- or millet-meal helps to keep people going when they cannot afford to buy staple foodstuffs themselves. It appears that the frequency of supplies of government food varied from site to site: in Xeidang, for example, FGD participants indicated that they received food aid sporadically, while participants in Ndama said that they received food aid every three months. The types and quantities of food supplied also varied from site to site. In Ndama participants mentioned that they sometimes exchanged their mealie-meal for other food, depending on what else was included in the food aid rations. At times they received just mealie-meal without relish, so they either exchanged some of it for other food items or sold a small quantity to get money to buy relish. Occasionally they would also exchange mealie-meal for non-food items such as clothes and buckets.

### **Box 9.1: Selling or bartering of food aid**

The issue of San selling or bartering their food aid is controversial. Government officials maintain that people should not sell or exchange the food aid, but it can be argued that people are using their food aid strategically to meet their basic needs. At the regional feedback meeting on the findings of our research held in Rundu in October 2012, a !Xun woman from Ndama gave the following explanation as to why people sold or exchanged food aid:

“I want to talk about the selling of maize-meal bags. I want to say that all of us need money including people who occupy higher positions. We as San are the lowest, because we do not work and as such where do we get the money? I also want to buy soap, lotion, relish and pay school fees in order to send my child to school. We are also expected to buy our own pots, dishes and blankets and even build our own houses. When you ask someone to put a house with iron sheets [sic], you must pay the builder something and in our case we give them a bag of maize-meal because that’s all we have.”

Thus, although food aid is intended to feed people, if it is sold or bartered, it is still making an important contribution to the livelihoods of the San.

### **Piecework**

Piecework was an important livelihood strategy at all four sites, despite the fact that piecework is generally not very well paid: in Xeidang, Jul’hoansi reported receiving N\$15 per day for piecework, from which N\$5 was deducted for food. They were not always paid in cash; they might be given mealie-meal or traditional beer instead – which might be by choice, but sometimes the employer decided on the form of payment irrespective of the worker’s wishes. Much of the piecework was seasonal, for example clearing fields and planting in the growing season. The residents of Xeidang were able to use their cash earnings to make small purchases at *cuca* shops on neighbouring farms. People in areas closer to urban centres, such as Ndama, had more opportunities for piecework than those in remote rural areas. In addition, some !Xun in Ndama were able to derive a small income from making and selling items such as bows and arrows and baskets.

### **Employment**

Very few people had formal permanent employment. For example, among the FGD participants in Ndama, only one person had a permanent job (a man employed by the Namibian Defence Force), and only one participant in Likwaterera had a permanent job (a young woman employed as a kindergarten teacher). A lack of education was said to be a significant barrier to formal employment, and FGD participants indicated that it was also difficult to get unskilled work as the government expected unskilled workers to have completed Grade 10 at least. Thus most formal jobs were given to people of other ethnic groups, leaving only low-paid jobs open to most San. Because of their low wages, and the situation of several household members being dependent on only one wage, it was very difficult for San in Kavango to escape poverty, even if a household member had a full-time job.

### **Veldfood**

Veldfood was an important part of people’s diet, and at each site FGD participants could provide a long list of veldfoods that they consumed. Table 9.4 (page 342) clearly reflects the importance of consuming veldfood as a livelihood strategy: it is the second most important food source, depending on seasonal availability (see the subsection on food security).

**“Mostly we survive on wild food but sometimes we get piecework and get mealie-meal in exchange.”**

– Discussion participant in Xeidang village

When piecework provides little or no money, veldfoods are the main form of relish eaten with mealie-meal.

### Sharing

A positive aspect of the San livelihoods in Kavango is that people with little or no income managed to survive lean times through the support of family members who were prepared to share with them, meaning that those without work or other means of income could still get by, and this even seems to be a crucial strategy for preventing starvation. However, at the same time, sharing keeps the San caught in the poverty trap as the little income and food to which they have access is shared rather than accumulated (see also the following subsections).

### Livestock

Only a few San had cattle or goats (thus Table 9.4 does not include livestock). Many FGD participants kept poultry, but mainly for sale rather than consumption. The majority of those who owned cattle or goats managed to do so only after a long period of saving some of the little money earned from piecework. In Xeidang it was said that only some young unmarried men were able to save money to buy cattle, goats or chickens as they had few or no dependants. The colonial government had given some people livestock, but these animals had either died or had been sold to raise cash.

### Crop fields

Few San at the Kavango research sites cultivated land, and none of them did so on a large scale; most of them had small vegetable gardens at their houses, and only the San of Likwaterera had crop fields. !Xun in Wiwi and !Xun and Ju|'hoansi in Likwaterera said that they would cultivate land if they were given oxen and ploughing equipment, which they could not afford to buy themselves.



Only one San person at the four research sites owned goats – a man in Xeidang.

## Old Age Pensions

At all four sites, Old Age Pensions were an important means to survive, and the pensions provided a regular cash income not just for the pensioner, but for the pensioner's whole family. The cash would be used to buy food, household necessities and alcohol. However, a number of elderly people were not receiving their pensions because they did not have the documents necessary for registration. For the elderly in Likwaterera, Wiwi and Xeidang, one of the main reasons for this situation was that they could not afford transport to Rundu to process the documents, whereas in Ndama, which is very close to Rundu, the main complaint from the elderly San was the unexpected long delays in processing their documents. When the elderly received their pensions, the income was often used immediately to pay the accumulated family credit at shops/shebeens, whether for food or alcohol.

## Food security

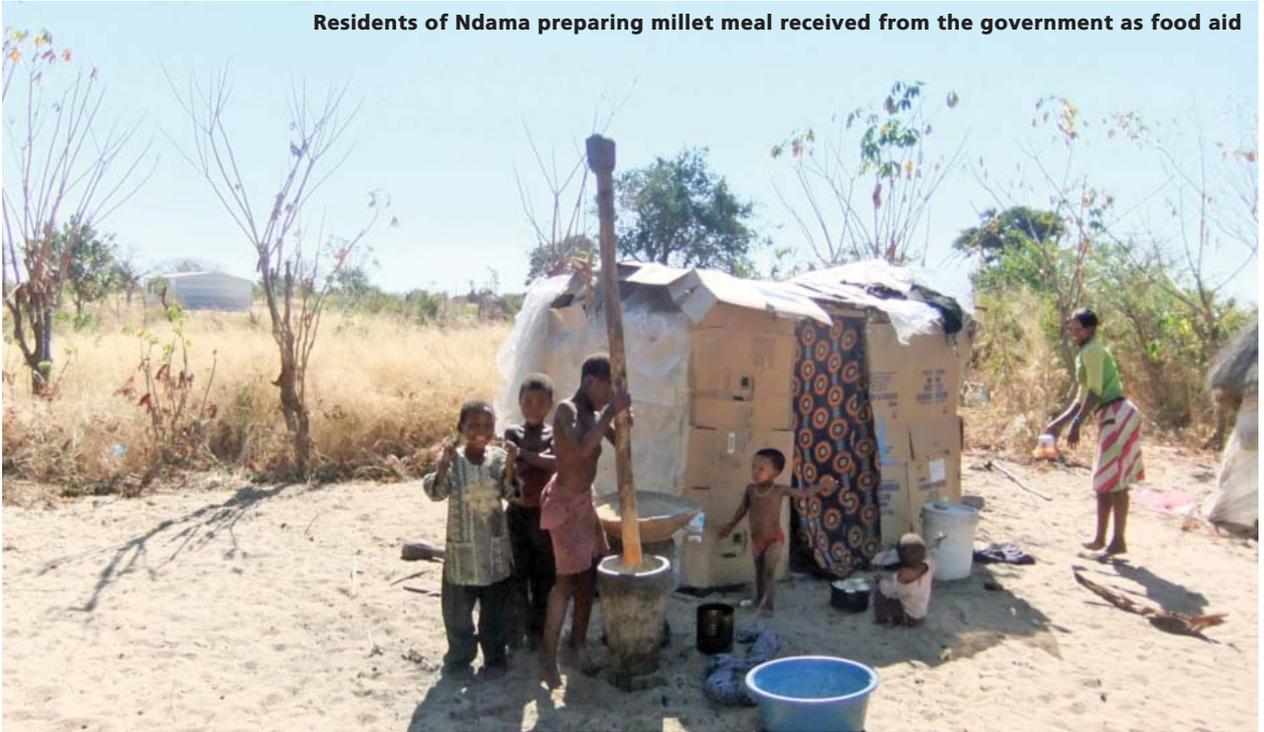
Table 9.4 shows that maize products (maize-meal or mealie porridge) were important foods at all four sites, whether provided by the government as food aid<sup>6</sup> or obtained by other means, such as piecework. At all sites, maize (in one form or another) was listed as a 'most important' food, i.e. eaten every day. In Xeidang it was said to be less important as the Ju|'hoan community there rarely received food aid, however it appears that they frequently consumed maize grown in their gardens. Veldfoods were the second most important type of food for most people, and FGD participants at all four sites were able to list a wide range of fruits, tubers, berries and leaves which they consumed, whether daily or rarely or at intervals in between – depending on seasonal availability.

**Table 9.4: Ranking of the most important food items at the Kavango Region research sites**

Research site	Most important (eaten daily)			Least important (eaten rarely)
Likwaterera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mahangu meal</li> <li>● Maize-meal</li> <li>● Ta*</li> <li>● Tjiha*</li> <li>● Tjau*</li> <li>● To*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sha*</li> <li>● Ncahani*</li> <li>● Nkwcankua*</li> <li>● Dwi*</li> <li>● Animal skin</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meat</li> <li>● Beans</li> <li>● Rice</li> <li>● Pasta</li> <li>● Tea</li> <li>● Sugar</li> <li>● Coffee</li> </ul>
Wiwi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maize-meal</li> <li>● Mangetti nuts*</li> <li>● Wild potato*</li> <li>● Ncoro Nomughimbo* (tuber)</li> <li>● Traditional beer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nompandu* (berries)</li> <li>● Grewia berries*</li> </ul>	Monkey orange*	Meat
Xeidang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Veldfood</li> <li>● Garden products (maize, beans and peas)</li> </ul>	Maize-meal	Hunted meat: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● springhares</li> <li>● porcupine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Other meat</li> <li>● Tea</li> <li>● Coffee</li> <li>● Sugar</li> <li>● Pasta</li> <li>● Rice</li> </ul>
Ndama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mealie porridge</li> <li>● Mutete (leaves)</li> <li>● Cassava leaves</li> <li>● Tinned fish</li> <li>● Biscuits/sweets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Makwevo* (fruit)</li> <li>● Grewia berries*</li> <li>● Maka* (berries)</li> <li>● Nonsimba (berries)</li> <li>● Nonsivi* (berries)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Matuu* (fruit)</li> <li>● Monkey orange*</li> <li>● Nompeke* (fruit)</li> <li>● Maghudusi* (gum)</li> <li>● Kakukuru* (fruit)</li> <li>● Mwimbo* (tuber)</li> <li>● Makopa* (berries)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rice</li> <li>● Noodles</li> <li>● Tea/coffee</li> <li>● Meat</li> <li>● Wild honey*</li> <li>● Nompundu</li> <li>● Wild onions*</li> </ul>

\* All these are veldfoods, including fruits and seeds from trees.

<sup>6</sup> Whether the food aid was channelled through the OPM San Feeding Programme or the Drought Relief Programme was not clarified at any site except Ndama, probably because the FGD participants were unsure about this; in Ndama participants made clear that they received their food aid through the San Feeding Programme.



The Jul'hoansi in Xeidang were the only research participants who listed small game as part of their diet – despite the fact that participants at all four sites stressed the importance of hunting as part of San culture. The data indicates that hunting does not play a crucial role in maintaining food security, most likely due to a lack of wild animals in many places. Anti-poaching legislation of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) has undoubtedly also had repercussions in terms of the diminishing importance of hunting for food security among the San in Kavango Region.

In Likwaterera, *mahangu* was mentioned as an important staple food alongside maize-meal. This was the only site where several San had crop fields. Jul'hoansi at Xeidang said that vegetable produce from small gardens comprised an important part of their diet.

Most of the least important food items listed in Table 9.4 are items which have to be purchased. As opportunities to earn cash were irregular and payments were low, items such as meat, rice and noodles were consumed only rarely – whenever people had some spare cash available.

FGD participants in Likwaterera, Wiwi and Ndama reported that they normally ate two main meals per day, usually consisting of mealie or *mahangu* (millet) porridge with some form of relish, if the latter was available. If sufficient veldfoods (e.g. *Grewia* berries) were gathered, they would snack on these during the day. In Likwaterera, for example, most participants ate *mahangu* porridge in the morning and leftover porridge in the evening, and in the afternoon they might eat a 'snack' such as pounded mangetti nuts with a dug-up veldfood called *gcau* to get them through the day. In times of food scarcity at these three sites, people ate only once a day or not at all. Xeidang differed to the other three sites in that participants said that they generally ate only once per day.

Perceptions relating to 'having enough food' varied from site to site: for some, having enough food meant having adequate supplies continuously throughout the year; for others it meant having enough food for the next meal. The !Xun in Wiwi said that they only really had enough when they received food aid, which might last a family three weeks. Traditional beer was an important food item in Wiwi when there was little or no cash to buy other food.

Food security varied according to season: during the rainy season ample quantities of a variety of veldfoods were available for gathering. In addition, San with crop fields or gardens had the most food during and just after the rainy season since water is not usually available for growing a large amount of produce year round. Depending on the size of the harvest, the food produced from fields or gardens might last up to three months.

The main threats to food security include:

- irregular delivery of government food aid;
- a lack of cash to purchase food;
- drought, which reduces harvests of rain-fed crops and garden produce as well as veldfood;
- enclosure of land by individuals (especially small-scale commercial farmers) who then refuse San access to veldfood;
- wildfires that destroy veldfood; and
- wild animals eating crops and garden produce in some places.

The San in Ndama appeared to be the most food secure, primarily because they had more regular sources of cash income due to their proximity to the town of Rundu.

### Perceptions of poverty

The *Kavango Regional Poverty Profile* (RPP) report published by the National Planning Commission in 2007 conveys that the San were generally perceived as belonging to the poorest group in the region. At three of the six sites visited for the NPC study, the San were placed in the “very poor” category “... as they do not own crop fields and do not produce their own food” (NPC 2007c: 53).<sup>7</sup> Although the RPP shows that the majority of the inhabitants of Kavango Region face challenges with regard to poverty, it explicitly links extreme poverty to the San as an ethnic group.

Our research confirmed the general findings of the Kavango RPP regarding the San and poverty. Table 9.5 shows that most of our FGD participants in Kavango classified themselves as “poor” or “very poor”. At all four sites people initially reported that all San were poor – perhaps comparing themselves to other groups in the region – but with further probing they differentiated between those San who were “better off” and those who were “poor”. Generally the “very poor” were people who had no income, no assets and nowhere to stay. Those described as being “better off” owned assets (e.g. cattle and ploughs) and had formal employment, or at least job opportunities.

Dependence on only a few sources of income, some of which were highly unpredictable, increased the vulnerability of the San. They were unable to cope with shocks or stressors such as losing essential assets. A participant in Ndama said, “A poor person cannot replace the things that have been damaged. There was a time a San house got burnt with everything in it. They could not replace the blankets and the things in the house.”

The research brought to light that those who were able to diversify their livelihood strategies – whether through Old Age Pension money, wages from permanent work, sales of goods or having a few head of livestock or a crop field – were generally better off than those who had a more limited range of livelihood options. It should be noted that livelihood strategies that require assets (e.g. farming) were rarely available to the San in Kavango, as very few had the means to invest in any form of assets, and external support was very limited in this region.

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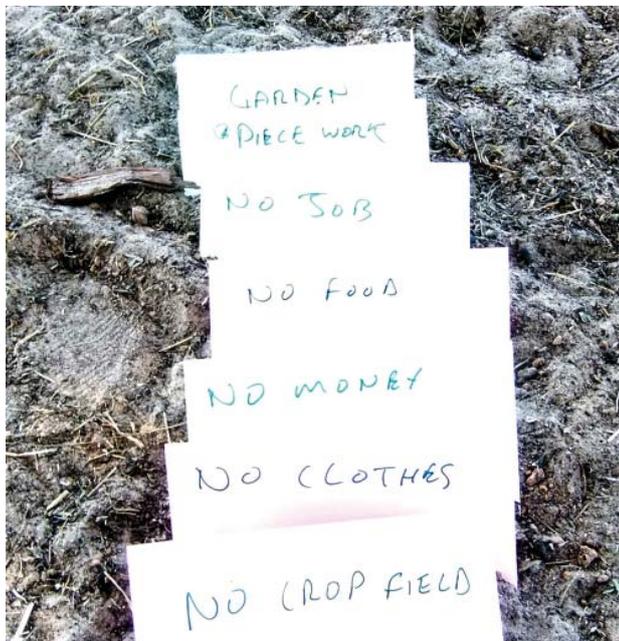
<sup>7</sup> The other three sites visited for the Kavango RPP had no San inhabitants.

**Table 9.5: Wealth ranking per site in Kavango Region\***

Research site	Very poor	Poor	Better off	Rich	Very rich
Likwaterera		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No blankets</li> <li>• No food</li> <li>• No work</li> <li>• Cannot afford to plough</li> <li>• No livestock</li> <li>• No assets</li> </ul> <p><i>San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Livestock</li> <li>• Working in town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50 cattle</li> <li>• 200 goats</li> <li>• Lots of chickens</li> <li>• Large fields</li> <li>• Cars</li> <li>• Money for problem solving</li> <li>• Brick/zinc houses</li> <li>• Household assets</li> <li>• Lot of shops</li> </ul> <p><i>Kavangos only</i></p>	
Wiwi		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No fields</li> <li>• No ploughing equipment</li> <li>• No seeds</li> <li>• No livestock</li> <li>• No assets</li> </ul> <p><i>San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More piecework</li> <li>• Some chickens</li> </ul> <p><i>Kavangos and a few San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lot of livestock</li> <li>• Cars</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Fields</li> <li>• Money to buy livestock</li> <li>• Ability to get work</li> </ul> <p><i>Kavangos only</i></p>	
Xeidang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garden</li> <li>• Piecework</li> <li>• No job</li> <li>• No money</li> <li>• No clothes</li> <li>• No crop fields</li> </ul> <p><i>San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No soap</li> <li>• Cannot eat whenever one wants</li> <li>• No own water source</li> <li>• Cannot afford to buy clothes</li> </ul> <p><i>San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cattle/goats</li> <li>• Equipment for ploughing</li> <li>• Oxen</li> <li>• Crop field</li> <li>• Good harvest to sell</li> </ul> <p><i>Only one or two San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car</li> <li>• Cattle money</li> <li>• Nice food</li> </ul> <p><i>Kavangos only</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job</li> <li>• Cattle</li> <li>• Lots of shops</li> <li>• Can eat whenever one wants</li> <li>• Can afford rice and macaroni</li> <li>• Cars</li> </ul> <p><i>Kavangos only</i></p>
Ndama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Piecework</li> <li>• Vulnerable to shocks</li> <li>• Cannot replace assets easily</li> <li>• No livestock</li> <li>• Hopelessness</li> <li>• Old blankets</li> <li>• Hungry</li> <li>• No good clothes</li> </ul> <p><i>San and other groups</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Piecework</li> <li>• People who sell things</li> <li>• Old Age Pension</li> <li>• Better clothes</li> <li>• Better houses</li> <li>• Job</li> </ul> <p><i>Other groups and a few San</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garden</li> <li>• Business</li> <li>• Farm with goats</li> <li>• Job with better salary</li> </ul> <p><i>Other groups only</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brick house</li> <li>• Shops</li> <li>• Cattle</li> <li>• Can eat whenever one wants</li> <li>• Car</li> <li>• Money</li> </ul> <p><i>Other groups only</i></p>	

\* The participants created their own wealth categories, thus these varied from site to site, and the research team has standardised the category names appropriately for reporting.

Even a San individual who received a regular income through permanent employment or an Old Age Pension could end up in the “poor” category if he or she had many dependants to support on this income. Sharing helped the San to survive in times of crisis, but the strategy of sharing with family members and neighbours in need could also prevent people from escaping the cycle of poverty. It was noteworthy that in some places, sharing was no longer practised in the same way as in the past: in Likwaterera, for example, FGD participants said that families shared very readily in the ‘old days’ but not so much nowadays, because of jealousy between families.



Wealth rankings in Xeidang: poor (above) and rich (below)



“Rich” people were described as having large numbers of cattle (e.g. more than 50), goats and chickens, a car, a job and a business or businesses. A participant in Xeidang said, “A rich man has food any time of the day and can eat whenever he feels hungry because food is just available.”

In terms of the FGD participants’ definitions, there was not a single “rich” (or “very rich”) San person in Kavango. In Wiwi and Xeidang, participants deemed a very small number of San to be “better off”, but the vast majority of participants at all four sites said that they were “poor” or “very poor”.

Generally, the San who participated in the FGDs regarded themselves as worse off than people of other ethnic groups in Kavango. Although they acknowledged that there were poor people among their neighbours, they felt that poor people of other groups were generally still better off than the San because they had relatives who helped them, for example by providing cattle, millet or agricultural equipment. In addition, participants said that it was difficult for San to get jobs and to move out of the “poor” category because of discrimination against San, which was often due to a lack of formal education: “If our elders went to school, it would be easier.”

**“Someone who only drinks traditional beer and eats some bushfood, they are the very poor.”**

– Discussion participant in Wiwi village

**“We as San people will never be rich, our lives will always be the same, we will always be poor.”**

– Discussion participant in Likwaterera village

## 9.4.2 Access to land

The San are generally recognised as being Namibia’s first inhabitants, and according to people’s oral narratives at the Kavango research sites, they lay claim to being the first inhabitants of Kavango Region. Participants in Wiwi said the village name was a San place name and the area had always been part of their land, even if they had practised a nomadic lifestyle in the past. The perceived mobility of the San (and a lack of documentation on their past land-use patterns) might partly explain why it is difficult for them to claim land of their own now (see Box 9.2). The settlement patterns of the San have also been disrupted by various events: the !Xun in Wiwi, for example, said that the SADF had moved them away from the area during Namibia’s liberation struggle, and they had returned only after Independence. Also, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the SADF had moved some community members to Bushmanland, and some had left for South Africa at Independence.

### Box 9.2: Resettlement of the San communities in Kavango Region

Resettlement is a strategy that the government is employing to address the problems faced by San people in Kavango Region (and regions, e.g. Caprivi). !Xun and Ju|'hoan communities had already been relocated to Likwaterera, and there were plans to relocate the San of Ndama and Xeidang too.

Residents of **Likwaterera** were unhappy because reportedly many of the things that they had been promised had still not materialised after two years of resettlement there. A particular problem was water: they had been promised water within the compound area but this had not materialised, and the women had to walk far to collect water from the main village borehole. Most villagers felt that Likwaterera was not a good place to stay. One man said, “We do not have a clinic here, our livestock are dying here, no support from anyone ...”, and another man said that their clothes had been stolen, there was nothing to do and there was no employment available. A woman stated that it was a little better where they lived before because they had more employment opportunities, fields to plant *mahangu* and a grazing area. A man stated that the area where they previously lived provided insufficient grazing and crop fields, and they were told that Likwaterera would provide sufficient land for grazing and cultivation, but this had not proved to be the case.

However, having noted their problems, the FGD participants acknowledged that they were better off in Likwaterera than they had been elsewhere. One person said, “Although we complain, life has improved since we moved here.” Nonetheless, in June 2012 *The Namibian* newspaper reported that some San people had left Likwaterera due to the lack of government support. In particular they still had to rely on too few oxen for ploughing (*The Namibian*, Staff Reporter, 26 June 2012).

There were also plans to relocate the San residing in **Ndama** to a new place called Gcaru. The Chief Clerk of Rundu Urban Constituency indicated that this San group had been informed and had shown interest in moving. They would be relocated once the Shambyu *Hompa* (King) agreed and the San themselves concurred that they would be willing to move. In our discussions with the San in Ndama, they acknowledged that although there were some advantages to moving to Gcaru, there could also be disadvantages, such as fewer opportunities to do piecework and sell items like the bows and arrows that men made. Most of the female FGD participants wanted to stay in Ndama due to its proximity to health facilities and schools for their children.

Both the Constituency Councillor and the Shambyu Traditional Authority (TA) were encouraging the Ju|'hoansi in **Xeidang** to relocate because the Shambyu TA had allocated the land to a small-scale commercial farmer. However, the Xeidang area was subject to a dispute between the Shambyu and Gciriku TAs, thus the regional land board had not yet issued a lease to the farmer. The Ju|'hoansi in Xeidang claimed they had lived there before the farmer arrived, and had set a number of conditions that they wanted the government to meet before they would move.

It is difficult to determine how well the government has consulted people regarding resettlement. International guidelines and policies – such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) – require that if indigenous people are to be resettled, this should be with their prior informed consent. Although resettled San in Kavango Region appeared to have been consulted, it was not clear whether the information they received was sufficient for them to make an informed decision about moving. Furthermore, it seems that sometimes the decision to move was based on promises made by the government that might or might not actually be fulfilled. In the case of Likwaterera, the Constituency Councillor told us that he had convinced people over a period of two years that it would be good for them to move. It seems as though the people agreed to move based on a number of promises of support that would come from the government, but they claimed that few of these promises had been kept.

In Likwaterera, FGD participants stressed that “This is our land, it belongs to us,” and one participant said, “All the land belongs to us, but it is also for other people to live on and use.” They said that their families who had lived in this area always lived close to water sources, and had temporary settlements at pans with seasonal water. In the past there were rules for using the land and its resources: there were hunting and gathering areas for specific family groups, and the boundaries of these areas were known by natural landmarks (trees, rocks, the river etc.). The name for such areas was *tse*.

In Ndama, !Xun said that the area where they lived had been created for the San, but other people had moved in and the !Xun were being squeezed to the southern edge of the area. This was said to be one result of San people giving up land to people of other ethnic groups in exchange for money: there appeared to be a system in Ndama whereby the first person to occupy a plot of land was recognised as having the right to that plot, and the right to negotiate the ‘sale’ of that plot. As mentioned previously, the legal basis for such transactions was not clarified in the course of our discussions. !Xun in Ndama said that they had come to recognise the importance of land, and did not wish to give away any more land.

The situation was different for San living on land allocated as small-scale commercial farms (SSCFs). To reach the research site at Xeidang, we travelled through a large block of SSCFs west of the Khaudum National Park in the Shambyu and Gciriku traditional areas. It was clear that these farms were being developed. Many had already been fenced off, and most had a signboard with the names of the farm and the ‘owner’.<sup>8</sup>

After our visit, the Shambyu TA approached the San in Xeidang to ask them to vacate the village due to the ongoing conflicts (see section 9.3.3 and Box 9.2). It was proposed that they move to an area near Taratara (see the map on page 330). According to the Regional Councillor, the Ju|’hoansi had agreed to move to that area only if the government provided them with their own school, a water point and a clinic there. The Regional Councillor believed that these demands would delay the relocation because some of them were unrealistic (e.g. the request for a school for Ju|’hoansi only) and/or were against government policies.



**One of Ndama’s pre-paid water taps, which the San did not use because they could not afford the fee.**

<sup>8</sup> Many farms, although not owned under freehold title, are held under leasehold from the communal land boards. However, some farms had been allocated by traditional authorities, and the land boards had not issued leases for these by the time of our visit.

There were San living on some of the other SSCFs in this part of Kavango, working as labourers or moving around to find piecework. Apart from conflicts over water, another problem for the San living in this block of SSCFs was restricted access to wild resources: reportedly, some of the new farmers chased away San who gathered veldfood on their farms. The farmers also seemed to believe that the San were stealing their cattle – an allegation that the Xeidang residents strongly denied.

### **Box 9.3: The need for land**

At all four sites in Kavango, FGD participants said that they needed land which they could call their own. Many San in this region have access to land and natural resources by virtue of their residence in villages that fall under Kavango TAs, and if San need land for cultivation, they ask the local headman for such land and generally it is granted – although most FGD participants said that they could not afford the oxen and equipment necessary for ploughing. It is not clear whether the headmen would still grant portions of land if many more San applied for such land.

The Shambyu headwoman in Likwaterera said that the non-San villagers had welcomed the new San residents, and then she joked: “They in fact are the ones who are supposed to welcome us because they are the owner of the land.” Nevertheless, the San groups in Kavango have no land that is formally recognised as *their* land in the same sense that other ethnic groups in this region have their own officially recognised traditional land.

### **9.4.3 Identity, culture and heritage**

Generally the San in Kavango Region do not refer to themselves as “San”, but rather as “*mucu*”, a Kavango term which the San use often, or otherwise as “!Xun” or “Ju|’hoansi”. The Ju|’hoansi of Kavango see themselves as separate from the Ju|’hoansi of the Nyae Nyae area in Otjozondjupa Region. They do not, for example, recognise the chief of the Nyae Nyae Ju|’hoansi as their own chief.

Despite being scattered among other ethnic groups and rarely forming the majority at the Kavango research sites, the San at all four sites had preserved a strong sense of cultural and ethnic identity. At all four sites it was said that people belonging to a San group can be identified by their language and physical characteristics. FGD participants at all four sites stressed that they were keen to preserve their traditional knowledge by passing it on to their children, but at the same time they said that they were adapting to the livelihood strategies and cultural traditions of neighbouring groups. For example, a general practice was to adopt names from other language groups, but to still use their San names among themselves.

Language was perceived as an important distinguishing marker for the culture of the various San groups. In Ndama the !Xun taught the children their own language and said that this was important “so that they don’t get lost in other languages”. In Xeidang, although the Ju|’hoansi usually spoke Gciriku among themselves (including the children), they still maintained that the Ju|’hoan language was culturally important.

Apart from language, the FGD participants listed a range of characteristics by which they defined San culture. Hunting and gathering were specifically defined as being part of San culture, not simply as livelihood activities. Gathering veldfood, even more than hunting, was still an important activity in day-to-day life, even in a peri-urban environment such as Ndama, from where San residents had to travel/walk a considerable distance to be able to gather veldfood (and hunt).



A !Xun boy at the cooking fire in Ndama

One of the elders in Likwaterera explained how young boys were taught how to hunt:

“Your father will take you to see how he hunts – it is like attending school. When you reach a certain age he allows you to see how he set traps and will make you re-set the traps. One day when he goes to the shebeen he will ask you to go and check the traps. The next step is now hunting animals with bows and arrows.”

Traditional knowledge was transferred to the younger generation when they accompanied their parents into the bush: the men taught their sons about bush lore and how to hunt, and the women taught their daughters which veldfoods to gather. FGD participants stressed that they taught their children “cultural things” such as how to perform traditional dances, how to survive in the forest, how to make weapons, and how to collect firewood and make fires.

In Ndama the men emphasised that they taught their sons how to hunt, even though they had to go far away from this site to find animals to hunt. The women taught their children how to gather veldfood (e.g. they showed them how to identify the trees and bushes from which they could gather fruits and berries), and they also taught the children about dancing, making necklaces and playing traditional games. Although the women specifically taught their daughters about veldfood, their sons also picked up skills relating to gathering traditional food when accompanying their mothers on food-gathering trips while still young.

#### 9.4.4 Relationships with other groups

The *Kavango Regional Poverty Profile* (RPP) indicates that generally there were no tensions among the different ethnic groups in Kavango Region, but that, while non-San groups considered themselves to be equals, they looked down on the San – as the following statement of a Kavango person quoted in the RPP exemplifies: “Sometimes we feel as if we own the San.” The RPP does state that there was increased social exclusion of the San after Independence due to tribal differences, but that the San also excluded themselves and did not participate in community meetings or decisions (NPC 2007c: 44).

Our research confirmed these general findings relating to inequality between the San and other groups in Kavango, but we examined the situation in more detail, and we found that the San at all four sites had complicated relationships with their Kavango neighbours. As mentioned previously, the San depended on good relationships for gaining access to land, and they were also dependent on Kavango people for piecework – one of the San’s main livelihood strategies. At the same time they complained that their temporary employers treated them badly and paid them poorly. Although the San recognised the need for piecework, they stressed that they would rather live deep in the bush “away from the black people”. Thus, despite the pattern of semi-integration with other groups, the San still clearly articulated a desire to live on their own and manage their own affairs. In Ndama, for example, there was a parallel village development committee (VDC) for the San (see further detail in section 9.4.8 on political participation). The Chief Clerk of Rundu Rural West Constituency stated the following: “As you know, these people like their own things. In the beginning they were part of the broader VDC but they insisted on having their own. They are now asking to have their own chief, because they do not trust blacks.”

Participants in our FGDs complained of discrimination by other ethnic groups, particularly when it came to job applications. They said that if a San person and a person from another ethnic group with the same qualifications applied for a job, the other person would always get the job because he/she came from the same group as the people who had to decide who to employ. In Likwaterera, discrimination was clearly linked to poverty. One participant said, “We are seen as San who are poor,” and others agreed with this. One woman said that they were born poor, and would always be poor because no one had ever shown them how to move out of this situation.

**“Whatever we get, we get with difficulty; nothing comes easy for us. We are not considered for good full-time jobs, only asked to look after cattle and work on people’s fields.”**

– Discussion participant in Likwaterera

#### **Box 9.4: Fostering/adoption of San children in Kavango Region**

In Kavango it is common practice for people of other ethnic groups to foster/adopt San children. FGD participants made clear that the San believe that their children are likely to be better off in more affluent households, and many hope that the children will be educated by their foster/adopted families. However, there was an emotional cost to the San, particularly if the new family removed their children from their home area.

In **Wiwi**, for example, it emerged that several children had been given away to “black people” for them to raise. One such child was Lydia, the sixth child of the headman: she was raised by “black people” in the Wiwi area, but then the family moved to Walvis Bay and took Lydia with them without her parents’ permission. Her parents had not seen Lydia since 2011. Another man in Wiwi said that four of his five children had been given to “black people” to raise. In **Xeidang**, a blind man said that he had agreed that two of his children should be taken away to live with foster families to work as babysitters, and both families were supporting the San children’s schooling. However, neither child ever visited their biological father: “I don’t feel good because since they took the children they don’t bring them here for me to meet them.” Many other San parents in this village had had a similar experience: they had consented to their children being taken by foster families but did not see the children thereafter. Asked if this was a good or bad thing, they said, “It is very bad.” Asked why they allowed their children to be taken, they said, “These people when they come they give so many promises that they will pay something and that they will bring the children to see [us].”

FGD participants at all four sites reported that when San and people of other ethnic groups were employed to do the same work, the latter would be paid more, and for fear of losing their jobs, the San never asked why others were paid more. They expressed the view that “black people” did not want San to improve their lives. A male participant added that only San children were taken out of their families to live and work for “black families” (see Box 9.4).

### 9.4.5 Education

At all four sites it was said that few older people had been to school at all or for long. Many said that their parents had moved around a great deal, so either it was difficult to go to school or there were no schools in the vicinity. Consequently the literacy rate among the elder San in Kavango was extremely low.

Although more children were going to school and attending for longer periods than their parents or grandparents had done, the dropout rate was still very high (as it was in San communities in other regions covered in this study). Most of the parents of children who had dropped out attributed this to the unaffordability of school fees. Two types of fees were charged: a fee for staying in a school hostel, and a payment to the School Development Fund to cover various school-related costs.<sup>9</sup> It appeared that schools were charging these fees despite the government’s policy directive to exempt children from marginalised groups such as the San. In addition, children reportedly dropped out because they could not afford basic items such as soap and clothes: other children teased them and told them that they were dirty and smelly. In remote areas, children had to travel long distances to attend school or to stay in school hostels. Table 9.6 reflects the school attendance rates of a total of 163 children at the Kavango sites at the time of our visit (early 2012). The dropout rate was high at all four sites.<sup>10</sup> Table 9.7 presents the reasons cited for children dropping out. Despite the fee-exemption policy, a lack of finance was the reason most frequently cited.

**Table 9.6: School attendance by San children at the Kavango research sites (early 2012)**

Attendance	# of San respondents	% of San respondents
Attended but dropped out	62	38.0
Never attended school	54	33.1
Still attending school	47	28.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100.0</b>

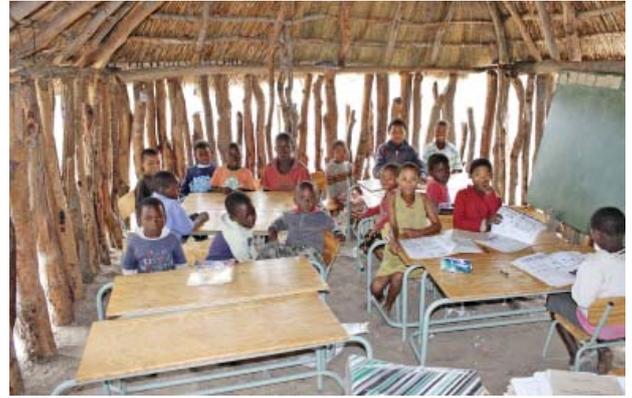
**Table 9.7: Reasons for San children dropping out of school in Kavango Region**

Reason	# of San respondents	% of San respondents
Financial	21	43.8
Other priorities	6	12.5
Gender	5	10.4
Lack of mobility	4	8.3
Started working	3	6.3
Issues at school	2	4.2
Misconduct	1	2.0
Other reasons	6	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In Wiwi all the parents said that they wanted their children to complete Grade 12, because then the children could get work and support their parents. They thought that the children would be eligible to get the following jobs if they completed Grade 12: teacher, nurse, police officer, pastor, office worker, soldier, hostel matron or government minister – depending on what job the child wanted

<sup>9</sup> As noted in previous chapters (e.g. footnote 15 on page 73), in January 2013 the legal obligation to contribute to the School Development Fund was abolished in all government primary schools.

<sup>10</sup> Information collected in the FGDs on individual participants’ and their children’s levels of education and reasons for dropping out of school (see Chapter 16 on education).



**The primary school in Wiwi, where the !Xun children seemingly fared well among children from other ethnic groups**

the most. Their children attended the village primary school, and the parents were generally happy with the school conditions as there was no dropout problem, no complaints about bad treatment of the !Xun children, and the principal allowed the children to stay at the school even if they could not afford school fees. The only problem identified was that the teachers were all non-San and the !Xun parents wanted San people to teach their children. After Grade 4 the children had to go to the school in Mpungu, where pupils were expected to wear shoes and a uniform, and to have their own blankets and soap, but parents said that they could not afford these things, thus their children dropped out in Mpungu.

San children in Likwaterera also attended the local primary school, where apparently the learners from other ethnic groups treated them well. However, parents in this village said that their children did not have school uniforms or toiletries, so they felt inferior to those who had these things and consequently they dropped out. The parents wanted their children to go to school and do well, but mainly so that the children could look after them when they were old.

In Xeidang the major problem facing children was that the nearest school was at Taratara, about 60 km away. Parents said that they could not afford the school fees there, nor the various other costs associated with children attending a school far from home. They wanted a school in the village so that their children could attain literacy without having to travel long distances for schooling: “We are crying for a school ... we want our children to be educated, go out there and get jobs and come back here in the village and help our village and develop it.”

The children in Ndama lived close to the local primary school and secondary schools in Rundu. Here it was said that many children did not attend school chiefly because parents did not encourage or force them to do so. This reflects a contradiction found at numerous sites in other regions covered in this study: parents said that it was important for their children to be educated, but they did not enforce school attendance. This non-enforcement is linked to a number of factors, but chiefly:

- cultural norms, i.e. San parenting styles are very non-coercive and children are not normally forced or pushed to do things, but rather are allowed to learn and socialise at their own pace; and
- socio-economic status, i.e. San parents report feeling threatened or intimidated by the school environment and personnel. (This issue is discussed in more depth in Chapter 16 presenting conclusions on San education.)

**“During the colonial times we were separate and taught separately from others. But after Independence we were mixed with others and the black people started telling us that San people are smelling and things like that. So it is very difficult for us.”**

– Discussion participant in Ndama

## 9.4.6 Health

Table 9.8 summarises the main health issues at each Kavango research site. The major health problems mentioned were TB, malaria and malnutrition. The latter occurred particularly among children, and diarrhoea was also said to be common among children.

**Table 9.8: Main health issues reported at the Kavango Region research sites**

Health category	Likwaterera	Wiwi	Xeidang	Ndama
Main diseases (according to FGD participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TB</li> <li>• Malaria</li> <li>• Diarrhoea</li> <li>• Heart attack</li> <li>• Leg/body pain</li> <li>• High blood pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HIV</li> <li>• TB</li> <li>• Malaria</li> <li>• Back pain</li> <li>• Diarrhoea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malaria</li> <li>• TB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coughing</li> <li>• Malaria</li> <li>• TB</li> </ul>
Main children's diseases	Malnourishment	No data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malaria</li> <li>• Coughing</li> </ul>	No data
Access to health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinic a day's walk away</li> <li>• Mobile clinic visits irregularly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinic at Mpungu (<math>\pm 30</math> km away)</li> <li>• Mobile clinic, but only for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinic at Baramasoni (<math>\pm 75</math> km away)</li> <li>• Mobile clinic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinic at Ndama</li> <li>• Rundu State Hospital</li> </ul>
Ambulance/transport	By foot or ask for a lift	Ambulance fetches patient in serious cases	Clinic is far away – need a lift to get there	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By foot to nearby clinic</li> <li>• Taxi (fare N\$8-10) to Rundu State Hospital</li> <li>• Ambulance comes if someone is very sick</li> </ul>
Delivery of babies (births)	Mostly at home	Mostly at home	At home	At home and at the clinic
Alcohol/violence	Alcohol abuse leads to violence	Children given beer when hungry	Alcohol misuse	Some people fight when drunk
Traditional medicine/healer	Traditional medicine	Traditional medicine but no traditional healer. In serious cases consult a healer elsewhere in the area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use traditional medicine</li> <li>• Visit traditional healers living nearby</li> </ul>	No data

The nurses interviewed at the clinics in Ndama and Mpungu ranked TB as the most frequent and most common disease among the San, and both reported that treating TB is difficult due to a range of factors:

- Often the San do not complete their TB treatment.
- The medication is very strong, and because the San do not eat regularly, the medication can have negative side effects.
- Since the San often stave off hunger by drinking alcohol, the medication together with the alcohol can have negative side effects and the medication might not be effective.
- The San often do not collect their medicine because of the long distances to the clinic, or they forget to take it regularly due to alcohol abuse.
- There is no system in place for monitoring whether patients take their medication.

The picture regarding HIV and AIDS at the Kavango research sites is blurred. FGD participants referred to the fact that HIV status is a personal issue (i.e. not to be discussed in public), and testing did not seem to be a widespread practice.

In Likwaterera the FGD participants said that they did not know whether HIV/AIDS was a problem as they never went for testing.

**“We don’t think about HIV/AIDS. There is nobody to tell us so we don’t know if we have it or not.”**

– Discussion participant in Likwaterera

People generally knew how HIV is transmitted, but condom use did not seem to be common. This was partly due to the fact that condoms were not easily available in remote villages such as Wiwi and Xeidang, and partly due to the older generation not being comfortable using them. In Wiwi people identified HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria as the main diseases suffered. FGD participants said that AIDS was killing many people – the incidence of HIV infection was high because, “The way we stay here, a new person comes in and gets a girl and infects her.” They knew that infection could be prevented by using condoms for men and women, and by abstaining from unprotected sex, but condoms were not available locally; people had to go to Mpungu to get them.

Malaria was said to be a problem at all four sites, but it appears that few people died from malaria.

Alcohol abuse was apparently a problem at all four sites. Although FGD participants did not explicitly identify this as a health problem, problems related to alcohol abuse were mentioned frequently throughout the discussions. Participants reported that everybody drank alcohol – even small children were given alcohol at some sites when they were hungry. One woman said, “If there is no milk in the mother’s breast, we give them alcohol to drink because he is hungry.” Some adults also drank to stave off hunger. Alcohol abuse was said to cause problems such as verbal and physical violence: people would get drunk and then quarrel at the bar or at home – sometimes violently. Participants also said that men and women sometimes had sex when they got drunk, even if they were not married or in any other kind of ‘romantic’ or sexual relationship with each other. According to the nurse in Mpungu, the death rate among San who had attended the clinic was proportionally higher than for non-San people. Between October 2011 and April 2012, six San people died at the Mpungu clinic as a result of alcohol intake combined with a lack of food.

FGD participants said that traditional medicines were effective. For example, if children were sick, they might give them traditional medicine made from roots. If a traditional healer was needed and there was no healer in the applicable village, the San would visit a healer in another village.

### ***Access to healthcare services***

As Table 9.8 indicates, residents of the three rural villages often had to travel far to access healthcare services. Mobile clinics did visit these villages, but not regularly.

Likwaterera’s residents accessed health facilities in Sambyu, Rundu and Ncuncuni. The women at this site reported that they faced serious difficulties if they encountered problems while giving birth.

Residents of Wiwi could go to the clinic in Mpungu for treatment in cases of serious illness, and in very severe cases they could call for the ambulance to collect a patient – i.e. if they had cellphone credit; if not, they had to make alternative arrangements for getting the patient to Mpungu. A mobile clinic visits Wiwi every two months to treat children.

For the Ju|’hoansi in Xeidang, the nearest clinic was at Baramasoni about 75 km away, and they rarely went there due to having no transport. FGD participants said that healthcare workers from the Catholic health facilities at Shambyu and Nyangana visited Xeidang three times a year to vaccinate the children.

In Ndama the women reported that some women gave birth in the village and some in the hospital: they would give birth at home if it was the middle of the night and they had no money for the taxi – transport to the hospital in Rundu cost N\$8 during the day and N\$10 at night. An ambulance could be called to collect a person who was very sick.

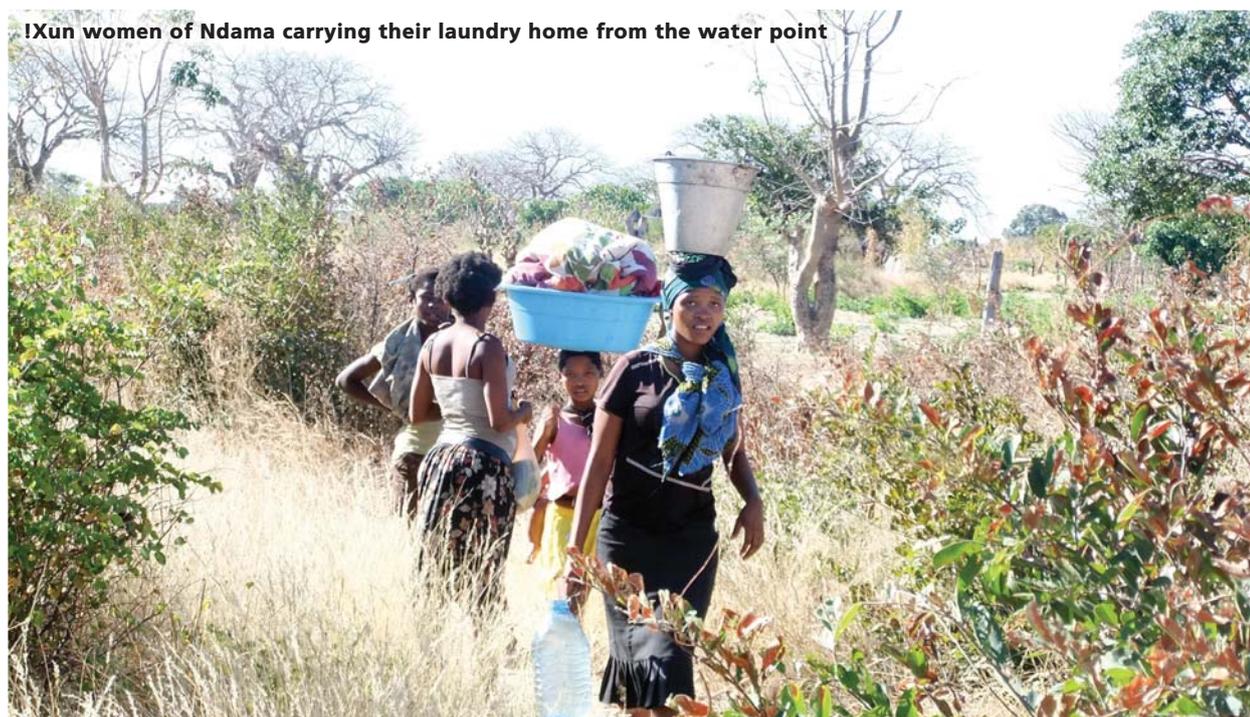
## 9.4.7 Gender

### *Gender roles*

At all four sites, men and women had clearly defined roles: women would fetch water, cook, look after children, clean the house and wash clothes, and men would assist with such work if a woman was ill or busy with another important task. Women and girls were responsible for veldfood gathering, but men also engaged in this activity on occasion. Women were also responsible for planting seeds and looking after crops (weeding, chasing away birds and insects, etc.), but both women and men did the harvesting. In Likwaterera only men looked after livestock because it was considered taboo for women to do so, but FGD participants could not say why this was the case. Men in Likwaterera also did the work of clearing fields, collecting building material, constructing and repairing huts, and collecting firewood for the fires that men used for storytelling among themselves and for educating their boys. Both men and women engaged in piecework, and the women would take their children with them when they did so.

### *Household decisions*

Most participants said that if a man or woman earned some money from piecework, they would discuss with their partner how to use the money. In some places women said that they controlled the household budget: in Likwaterera, for example, women said that when deciding on household priorities, “Most times women would first think of using the N\$1 she makes to purchase food before they drink, while men would first think of going to the bar before buying food.” A man in the same village stressed that both he and his wife would first spend money on food, and then would spend



**!Xun women of Ndama carrying their laundry home from the water point**

a little on *otombo* (home-brewed beer). Asked who took the decisions in a marriage, one of the elders in Likwaterera said that it depends – a woman might decide what a man should do, as long as there was mutual understanding. Asked about family planning, he said that there were no such discussions: “People believe in having many children and can have as many as God allows. Maybe it is only people of today who can decide on how many kids to have and they go for contraceptives and this is the culture of white people.”

### ***Inheritance***

FGD participants in Xeidang explained that if a husband died, his family would take any livestock that the family might have owned. The family might decide to give the widow one or two animals, but usually they would take most of them. Fields would be left in the widow’s possession as they were needed to feed the children. In Xeidang it was said that if the husband died, his brother and/or cousins would inherit any property because the widow was not a member of the deceased’s family as such; she was only indirectly related by marriage. If there was nothing left once the property had been distributed to these male relatives, the widow was expected to know where to go to survive; the deceased’s brother would not take her in, although he would be responsible for the children. Asked if they thought this to be a good tradition, the women emphatically said “No!”. Asked how a woman would survive in these circumstances, a man replied that when the children grew up they would assist her, but in the meantime the woman would have to go back to her own family and then look for another husband.

### ***Participation in the research discussions***

The men dominated the discussions at all four sites; the women sat separately and were usually reluctant to contribute. Often when we specifically addressed the women, the men took it upon themselves to answer on the women’s behalf. At each site there were one or two more assertive women who were more willing to contribute, but they had to compete with the men for a chance to speak.



A man in Likwaterera helping to make the women comfortable for the discussion

## 9.4.8 Political participation

The San in Kavango Region were only partially integrated into existing decision-making processes and structures. The various Kavango TAs and a number of other decision-making bodies had the potential to affect the lives of the San. Where San were living with other groups, as in Likwaterera, Wiwi and Ndama, the San were sometimes (not always) involved in local decision-making bodies such as the water point committee (WPC) or the village development committee (VDC). However, FGD participants who had been involved in such bodies reported that despite being able to express their views in meetings, these bodies took little or no action thereafter to address the issues made known to them. Table 9.9 summarises the situation regarding San representation in decision-making bodies at the Kavango research sites.

In Likwaterera the San were not represented on the VDC. They said that they had asked to be involved, but were denied the opportunity. Therefore this VDC did not take decisions that affected the San living in the compound, but rather concentrated on issues outside the compound. The San did have a representative on the WPC, however. He had a key for the water point and attended the WPC meetings, in which he was given the opportunity to speak. The government contributed money for the water point on behalf of the San, and this money went straight to the WPC leadership – but the FGD participants complained that they were not informed about the disbursements of this money.

**Table 9.9: San participation in local decision-making bodies at the Kavango research sites**

Research site	Representation
Likwaterera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not represented on the VDC. A Shambyu VDC member is responsible for the San.</li> <li>● Represented on the WPC, but complained of discrimination.</li> <li>● No own structure for making decisions for the San villagers.</li> <li>● Two San leaders elected by the San to report to the Shambyu headwoman.</li> </ul>
Wiwi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Represented on the VDC until recently when the representatives were removed.</li> <li>● Represented on a committee of advisors to the Kwangali headman.</li> <li>● Not represented on the WPC.</li> </ul>
Xeidang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No representation on the VDC and WPC.</li> <li>● No reported relationship with a local Shambyu or Gciriku headman.</li> <li>● Own village headman.</li> </ul>
Ndama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Separate VDC for San consisting of five members.</li> <li>● Three San representatives on the overall VDC.</li> <li>● No WPC in this neighbourhood.</li> <li>● Communicate directly with the Constituency Office of the Regional Councillor.</li> </ul>

In Ndama, a separate VDC was created for the San to operate in tandem with the overall VDC in the area. The San VDC consisted of three men and two women, and there were three San representatives on the overall VDC. According to the Chief Clerk of Rundu Rural West Constituency, the San VDC members would hold their meetings and then communicate their issues to the Regional Councillor – issues relating to, for example, deaths in the community and the shortage of food. She described the San VDC members as the “eyes and ears of the councillor”.

In Wiwi, both !Xun and Kwangalis had been on the VDC, but, according to the FGD participants, the !Xun representatives were removed during the VDC meeting preceding our visit, for reasons apparently unknown to the FGD participants. The !Xun wanted to be represented on the committee again because, “Since we are an independent country it is not fair that only one ethnic group should be represented.” The participants said that the WPC consisted only of people of other ethnic groups: “It seems like apartheid, we are not working together.” One of the !Xun men had been involved in the maintenance of the tap at the water point, but had since been removed from the WPC, also for reasons apparently unknown to the FGD participants.

Most FGD participants at the Kavango research sites said that they participated in national and regional elections, and a few did not because they felt that the government did not listen to them.

Most FGD participants at all four sites also said that they knew their rights under the Namibian Constitution, but when probed, they were unable to cite any examples of such rights. Very few people knew that indigenous people have particular rights by virtue of international policies/declarations regarding indigenous people – let alone cite examples of indigenous people’s rights.

In sum, most San at the Kavango research sites shared a sense of being isolated from mainstream decision making, and a feeling that they cannot influence the government. At each site people said that they had communicated their problems to the government, but in most cases there had been no response. For example, a woman in Likwaterera said, “The government has registered us several times, but they go and sleep on those books. Nothing has happened since they brought us here.” Our FGDs as well as our stakeholder interviews and regional workshops in Kavango (and other regions) brought to light considerable differences in the perceptions of San groups and government officials concerning the extent to which the government consulted the San about issues affecting them. For example, the Chief Clerk of Rundu Rural West Constituency reported that the Constituency Councillor visited the San in Ndama every two weeks, whereas the FGD participants in Ndama said that they rarely saw the councillor. It is possible that on the one hand the officials were keen to show that they were supporting the San, while on the other hand the San were deliberately exaggerating their experiences in order to gain sympathy – perhaps in the hope of acquiring some external support.

### ***Traditional authority***

The San interviewed in Kavango Region resorted under the jurisdiction of existing Kavango TAs by virtue of their residence on land which was officially the dominion of one or another traditional group, but in Likwaterera, Xeidang and Ndama, FGD participants did not feel represented by the TAs under which they resorted.

There was no unanimous opinion as to whether the San in Kavango should have their own TAs. FGD participants in Xeidang and Ndama would prefer to have their own autonomous TAs, whereas participants in Likwaterera thought that it would be impossible to establish their own TAs within the jurisdiction of existing Kavango TAs, and therefore that they would have to remain subjects of Kavango TAs, but with their own representatives in these TAs. Table 9.10 shows the different relationships between the San and the TAs at each site in Kavango.

**Table 9.10: The San and traditional authorities at the research sites**

Research site	Relationship with TAs
Likwaterera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● San chief passed way a few months ago.</li> <li>● San resort under Shambyu Homba (Chief) Matumbo Ribebe, but do not accept him as their chief.</li> <li>● San have two representatives among the 12 advisors appointed by the local Shambyu headwoman.</li> </ul>
Wiwi	San resort under Kwangali Chief Sientu Mpasi, through the local senior headman.
Xeidang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● San officially resort under the Shambyu TA, but do not recognise the Shambyu chief as their representative.</li> <li>● San have their own authority (headman/elder) in the village.</li> <li>● San want to have their own TA, which could represent the San of Xeidang, Taratara, Samagaigai, Sedon, Ncali, Navara, Nhoma, Shinunga, Ncavazi, Shakambu and Likwaterera.</li> </ul>
Ndama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● San resort under the Shambyu TA.</li> <li>● San want to have their own TA in each tribal area in Kavango Region.</li> </ul>

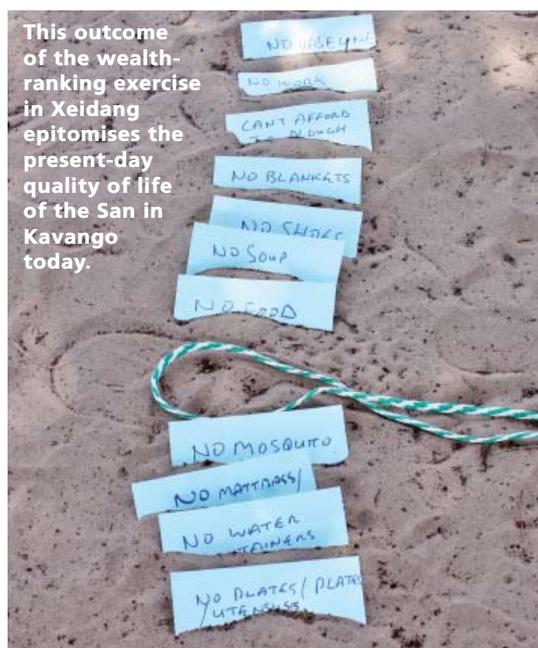
## 9.4.9 Changes over time and visions for the future

### *Changes in quality of life over time*

Discussions on changes in the quality of life over time at the Kavango research sites revealed similarities in perceptions, but also reflected the different histories and situations of the applicable communities. FGD participants in Wiwi, Xeidang and Ndama thought that life was better around 10 years (or more) before Independence, in particular because more food was available at that time and it was easier to get jobs. In this context participants also mentioned that they were still able to hunt at that time, because there was more game available and conservation laws were not strictly enforced. In addition, for some San, employment in the SADF provided a regular cash income. By contrast, participants in Likwaterera said that life was much more difficult before Independence because the San were not seen as human beings.

In Ndama, FGD participants said that they became poorer after Independence because “everything we asked for never came”. They were given mealie-meal but no relish, for example, and they did not feel part of the Namibian nation. Before Independence they were assisted by “whites”, but after Independence they were seen as part of the SADF as they had been used as trackers during the war. The San in Ndama considered the present time as the worst for them because it was more difficult to get work and food, and government food aid was not received regularly. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing the highest quality of life, FGD participants in Ndama ranked their quality of life in 2012 at 5 compared to 10 in 1980.

The quality of life for the San in Wiwi has fluctuated over the past 30 years or more. For them, life was best before the war for independence, when they moved from Mpoto to Gode and were provided with oxen and ploughing equipment. During the war their quality of life deteriorated because they had to move from Gode and lost everything, although some of the men were able to get employment in the SADF. Life improved a little after Independence because they could access more food, but worsened again when they had to move to Wiwi due to the lack of water at Gode. Now life had improved once again due to government food aid. The !Xun of Wiwi ranked their quality of life in 2012 at 3 compared to 10 before the war.



For the San in Xeidang, life was marginally better before Independence because healthcare was free of charge, the men could hunt and there was more wild food available. After Independence their quality of life declined because they could no longer hunt and they also had to pay for healthcare. Their quality of life was the lowest at the time of the research due to insecurity of land tenure and the irregular delivery of food aid. The Ju|’hoansi ranked their quality of life in 1980 at 2 and in 2012 at 0. The FGD participants in Xeidang were the most negative about their quality of life in general, and we noted a strong tendency to exaggerate the negative aspects of their situation – more so than at the other three sites. This is possibly due to their remoteness as well as the threat posed by the allocation of the land that they occupied to an individual as a small-scale commercial farm.

In Likwaterera the FGD participants said that their quality of life before Independence was worse than after Independence because they did not have schools, and were seen merely as a source of cheap labour on farms. Life improved after Independence because the San were encouraged to go to school and the food-for-work programme was implemented. The best time was in 2010, just after their move to Likwaterera, as some people had been able to cultivate their own fields, and the fence around the San compound facilitated good management of the livestock and fields. At the time of our research, however, their quality of life was not considered to be so good because the government had not kept its promises after the San moved to Likwaterera and food aid was delivered less frequently than in the past. FGD participants in Likwaterera used a scale of 0-20 to rate their quality of life, and their ratings were 0 before Independence, 18 in 2010 and 16 in 2012.

### ***Changes in the future***

It appeared that few participants in our research discussions expected their situation to improve significantly in the future: they saw little hope of their economic situation changing because they lacked education, skills and productive assets, and could not afford to buy such assets. Few imagined living and finding permanent work in a big town in the future. Educational and job ambitions rarely extended beyond Grade 12 and positions such as soldier, nurse, policemen or teacher.

**“We as San people will never be rich, our lives will always be the same, we will always be poor. It seems that this is the way that God wants us to live. Even our forefathers have gone [sic] to urban towns such as Grootfontein where they found work, but all always came back with nothing.”**

– Male FGD participant in Likwaterera

Participants in Xeidang thought that they would still be there in 10 years’ time. One person said they would like to see development such as schools, their own land for cultivation and access to a good source of water. However, others thought that there was no chance of life changing for the better because of the constant conflicts over the land, and because of the difficulty of communicating the San’s needs to government officials. For example, participants said that they had no opportunity to go and talk to the government to get a school built: “It is for you who collect information from us who can talk with the right people about it.”

### **9.4.10 Impact of external support**

The San in Kavango Region are recipients of various types of external support, mainly from the government, although not all San receive the same level of support. For example, remote villages such as Wiwi and Xeidang did not receive much direct support in the form of projects or funding, but even remote villages such as these received food aid from the OPM’s San Feeding Programme, which is the main source of government support to the San in this region.

In terms of impact, the San Feeding Programme clearly plays a major role in providing some degree of food security for the San in Kavango, and probably keeps some people alive who might otherwise starve (see section 9.4.1 on livelihoods and poverty). However, the sustainability of this programme is questionable (see section 9.5).

It was often difficult in the FGDs to acquire information about other forms of government support. In Ndama, for example, when we first asked about external support, people said that they had not received any support from the government or the regional councillor apart from food aid, but when

questioned in a later session, they said that they had received some support from the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW). For example, the MGECW had visited them to investigate their problems and to check on the orphans and children in need. Furthermore, the MGECW had brought shoes for the elders. One woman said that she had approached this ministry for support for her children, and the ministry had duly provided support for the children's education, thus her children were now attending school. Asked if the MGECW had provided this support to all San people, this woman replied that indeed it did, but no other FGD participants confirmed having received such support.

It also emerged that the Rundu Rural West Constituency Office had assisted the people of Ndama with the establishment of a butchery project. The Chief Clerk of this office reported as follows: The Regional Council provided N\$15 000 to initiate the project. The beneficiaries received two weeks' training. The intention was that the butchery would be self-sustaining, but beneficiaries started misusing the money. Non-San people were taking meat on credit and not paying their debts to the butchery, and the San were taking meat for themselves. Consequently they could not make enough profit to buy the next consignment of stock, so they decided to withdraw the money and divide it among themselves. They also started selling the infrastructure and materials to non-San people – the Constituency Office put a stop to this. The project failed badly.

The Chief Clerk also reported that elsewhere in the constituency (i.e. in Sitenda and Ncuncuni), San were being supported with cattle projects. We also heard from a social worker in the MGECW that the government, in collaboration with other sponsors, was supporting about 180 San children residing in the community hostel at the Mururwani veterinary checkpoint. The children were being sponsored by the woman who runs the hostel, companies such as MTC, and sometimes the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The MGECW provided psychosocial support to learners – particularly some of the San learners who were as old as 18 but in lower grades at the school, who therefore needed encouragement to continue their schooling. The ministry also provided grants to orphans. Also, the MGECW Directorate of Community Development had helped the residents of Likwaterera. The children who moved there had not attended school previously, but the directorate had spoken to the parents and helped to register the children so as to encourage them to go to school. The directorate had also helped the San in Likwaterera to establish the kindergarten there.

Individual regional councillors were also providing different types of support to San communities in their constituencies, including assisting people to obtain identity documents and birth certificates, providing access to training and helping children through school. Such support has positive impacts for the individuals concerned, but it needs scaling up to have an impact on the majority of San.



## 9.5 Regional conclusions and recommendations

The San are among the poorest people in Kavango Region, but it has to be noted there are many very poor people among other ethnic groups in Kavango. The *Kavango Regional Poverty Profile*, based on village-level participatory poverty assessments (NPC 2007c), conveys how many Kavango people face livelihood problems akin to those of the San. However, a number of factors render the San more marginalised within this larger category of poor people:

- Difficulties obtaining formal/permanent work positions:
  - Lack of education: San children drop out of school and so lose the opportunity that education might provide for them to escape poverty through employment.
  - Discrimination: Employers are reportedly reluctant to fill vacant positions with San applicants and/or tend to appoint members of their own ethnic group.
- High level of vulnerability: The San cannot cope easily with shocks. For example, when San lose assets (e.g. livestock), it is extremely difficult for them to replace them. Their social networks do not include a critical mass of better-off people who can assist in hard times; their livelihoods are not diversified enough to cope with shocks; and there are not enough wealthier relatives who can offer temporary work. For the San, assistance in hard times is generally limited to sharing what little food they have with their families and neighbours.
- Marginalisation: The San are more politically marginalised than other groups, and find it difficult to make their voices heard.

Government food aid was clearly important for San livelihood, and kept some people from starving, but this aid is not a sustainable option for the long-term development of most San in Kavango. In addition there appeared to be practical problems in ensuring the regular delivery of food aid.<sup>11</sup>

A number of other government interventions are taking place, but these are not necessarily having a major impact on livelihoods and lifting San people out of poverty, partly because many are small in scale or are initiatives of individuals such as constituency councillors, rather than being part of a larger, planned programme of support.

FGD participants often said that “the government must bring projects”, but they had little idea as to what these projects should be in practice. In Kavango there are many examples of failed income-generating projects, and very few examples of successful businesses that improved livelihoods. However, many San said that if they could be given livestock and ploughing equipment, they could clear fields, plough and grow their own food. Some more strategic thinking about the nature of long-term support for the San of Kavango is required, building on the examples of the many failed garden and other projects that litter the region. Such support could include means to help people to grow their own food at a sufficient scale to make a real difference; means to help learners to stay in school; and creating employment opportunities for San. Monitoring and evaluation procedures should be thoroughly established to enhance the effectiveness of support and provide lessons for future activities.

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<sup>11</sup> At the regional feedback meeting on the findings of our research held in Rundu during October 2012, the Chief Clerk of Rundu Urban Constituency explained that the frequency of delivery is affected by logistics and the vastness of the region. In addition he explained that in Namibia, 12.5 kg of maize-meal is given as a quantity calculated to meet the energy needs of a single person per month. This figure, he explained, is arrived at using international standards. A San person from Ndiyona Constituency questioned this explanation by arguing that the food is not provided regularly and that the quantity also keeps changing. The Chief Clerk then explained that the amount of food distributed may vary depending on the availability of food, and the government does not provide relish in the expectation that the people can still access wild food that they can use for this purpose.

The issue of resettlement also requires careful consideration. While efforts to relocate San seem to be based on good intentions in most cases, it is not clear whether the full implications of resettlement have been thought through in the choice of new sites. The relevant officials and the San themselves need to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of resettlement more carefully. For example, the proposed relocation of people from Ndama to an area much further away from Rundu will provide them with land, move them away from shebeens and perhaps give them easier access to veldfood, but it could also reduce their opportunities for piecework and for selling their crafts, and impede their access to schools and healthcare services. Such a situation could entrench the San's currently high dependence on government food aid, reduce the opportunities to educate San children, and increase the costs of healthcare, since scheduled visits by a mobile health facility would be needed if there is no health facility at the new site.

The research brought to light that some San wished to live "away from the black people", and this raised concerns among government officials in the feedback meeting in Rundu in October 2012: one official argued that the San should not categorise themselves as a minority group, but should rather integrate with others to enhance cohesion and peace; and another wondered why the San wanted to be treated as a special group – he worried that this was advocating for separation. Clearly, strategies to support the San should not promote a new form of apartheid, but it is important to recognise why some San feel the need to be on their own: this can be ascribed to the unequal power relations that they experience; San allege that they are on the receiving end of ethnic discrimination in many sectors (education, employment, land, politics etc.), hence they do not feel integrated into the broader Namibian society. They do not believe that they have a say regarding their own development or the distribution of resources such as land. Outsiders do not recognise their traditional land-use practices and claims of land ownership, and they feel squeezed out by incomers. For example, in the Rundu feedback workshop the headman from Wiwi stated the following: "I represent San people at Gode village near Wiwi. Before Independence, there were few blacks there and many San people. After Independence Gode village became full of blacks and the San people there became scattered. So even if we get cattle now, there is no land, because blacks have taken the whole area."

The need for San representation in local decision-making bodies such as VDCs and WPCs also has to be addressed. In the feedback workshop it was pointed out that such representation is subject to performance appraisal and not tribal balance, but in the case of the San there are strong arguments for applying positive discrimination to ensure their representation in key decision-making structures that affect them directly. Such an approach would aid the government's efforts to fulfil its obligations as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Positive discrimination is not a new concept in Namibia; since Independence it has been applied in favour of "formerly disadvantaged Namibians" in allocating jobs, resources and so on.

The same concept of positive discrimination needs application in the education sector to ensure that San children enrol in school, do not drop out, and move on to tertiary education should they so choose. San representation on school boards serving their communities must also be ensured.

Government in Kavango Region, through the OPM, line ministries and constituency offices, is providing a number of services to the San and a number of specific support activities. The message from our research sites is that the San themselves would like to participate more fully in discussions and making decisions about how they should be supported. We strongly recommend that the OPM and the Kavango Regional Council cooperate to work directly with the San communities to initiate a review of the existing interventions in support of the San across all sectors. This review should then lead to the government and San jointly developing a more coherent and comprehensive strategy of support to the San communities in the region.