



# "Scraping the Pot"

**San in Namibia Two Decades After Independence**



Edited by  
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Sara Gumus (born 1926), a Hai||om woman in Outjo, Kunene Region.

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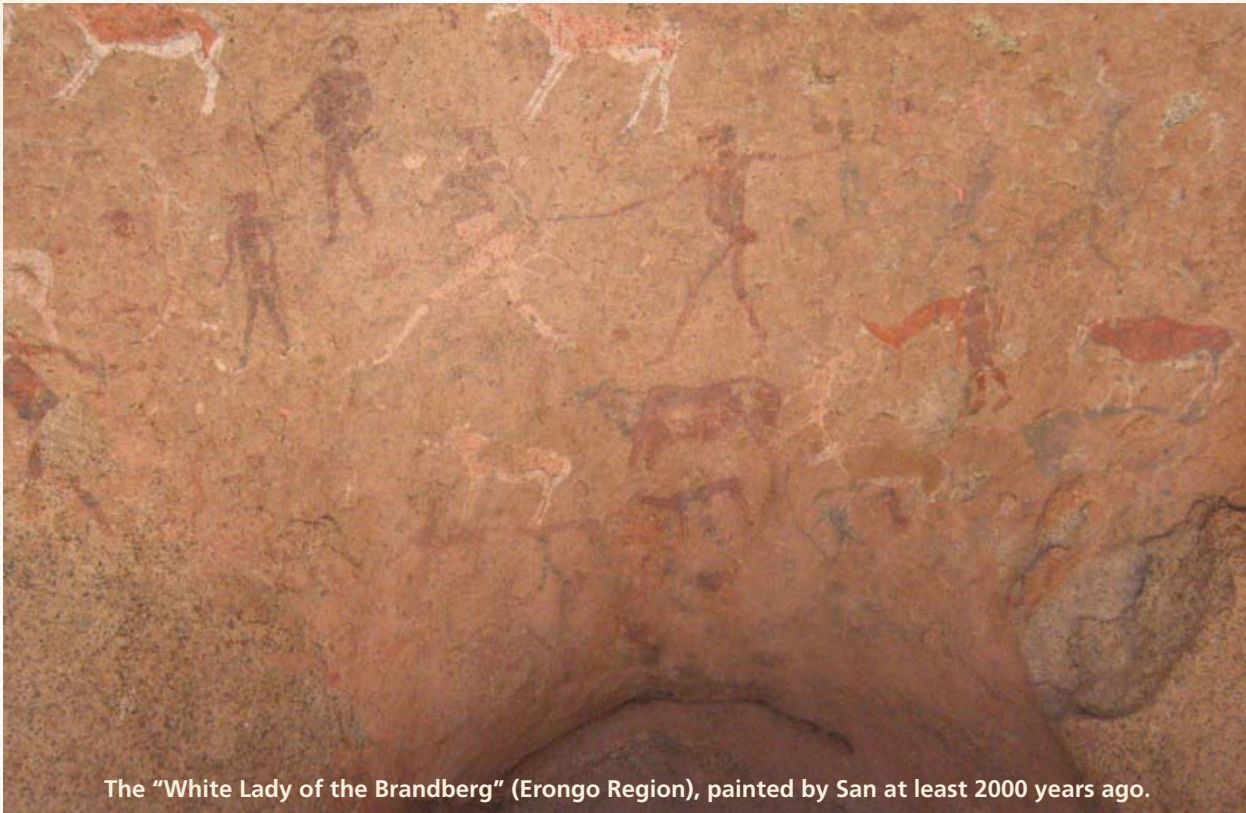


**Land, Environment and Development Project  
of the  
Legal Assistance Centre  
and  
Desert Research Foundation of Namibia**

Windhoek  
NAMIBIA  
2014

# Dedication

**This report is dedicated to  
Namibia's "first people" – the San.**



The "White Lady of the Brandberg" (Erongo Region), painted by San at least 2000 years ago.

## **The title of this report: "Scraping the Pot"**

The term "scraping the pot" derives from a popular Jul'hoan folk tale, "Tug of War" (recorded in Bieseke 2009: 39-44), which tells the story of how San people came to be oppressed by others. The notion of "scraping the pot" after all the others have eaten summarises the feelings of many San today, two decades after Namibia's Independence: they feel left behind while other Namibians enjoy the fruits of Independence.

The Namibian Government and many other stakeholders have put much effort into improving the circumstances of the San, yet still, everywhere in the country, they remain in a very marginal position. This report sheds light on their current circumstances, and provides insight into the underlying causes of their continued marginalisation. We hope that a better understanding will lead to more effective cooperation between the San communities and those who wish to support them in confronting the challenges still facing them.

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	ix
Foreword .....	xi
Preface .....	xii
Executive Summary .....	xiii

## Part I

### Background to the Study ..... 1

#### Chapter 1: Introduction ..... 3

1.1 Background and purpose of the study .....	3
1.2 Methodology .....	6
1.2.1 Site selection .....	7
1.2.2 Participatory research methods .....	8
1.2.3 Focus group discussions .....	9
1.2.4 Stakeholder interviews .....	9
1.2.5 Literature review .....	10
1.2.6 Regional and national workshops .....	10
1.2.7 Compilation of the regional chapters .....	11
1.2.8 Limitations of participatory research methods .....	11
1.2.9 Limitations of quantitative data on San in Namibia .....	13
1.3 The problem with quantitative data on San in Namibia .....	13

#### Chapter 2: The Legal Framework in Namibia ..... 17

2.1 What 'indigenous' means in Africa .....	17
2.2 International framework addressing indigenous peoples' rights .....	18
2.3 Namibian legislation regarding indigenous peoples' rights and the rights of the San .....	20

#### Chapter 3: A Brief Profile of the San in Namibia and the San Development Initiatives ..... 21

3.1 The San of today .....	21
3.2 Labels and history .....	24
3.3 San in the first decade after independence .....	26
3.4 Main stakeholders in San support initiatives over the last 10 years .....	28
3.4.1 Government – particularly the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) .....	28
3.4.2 International Labour Organization (ILO): "Promoting and Implementing the Rights of the San Peoples of the Republic of Namibia" .....	30
3.4.3 Office of the Ombudsman .....	30
3.4.4 San Support Organisations' Association of Namibia (SSOAN) .....	31
3.4.5 Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) .....	32
3.4.6 San Traditional Authorities (TAs) .....	34
3.4.7 Namibian San Council .....	36



## Part II

# Geographical Analysis ..... 37

Chapter 4: Omahake Region .....	39
4.1 General background .....	39
4.2 The San in Omahake Region .....	41
4.3 Research sites in Omahake Region .....	43
4.3.1 Skoonheid .....	44
4.3.2 Kanaan (in Epako, Gobabis) .....	45
4.3.3 Blouberg .....	46
4.3.4 Corridor 17-b .....	46
4.3.5 Corridor 13 .....	47
4.3.6 Goreseb, Otjinene .....	48
4.4 Research findings .....	49
4.4.2 Food security .....	55
4.4.3 Poverty and wellbeing .....	57
4.4.4 Social mobility .....	61
4.4.5 Alcohol, drugs and violence .....	63
4.4.6 Social support networks .....	63
4.4.7 Education .....	64
4.4.8 Political participation and representation .....	70
4.4.9 Health and healthcare services .....	76
4.4.10 Gender .....	81
4.4.11 Engagement of the youth in agricultural and communal activities .....	82
4.4.12 Changes over time .....	83
4.4.13 Culture and identity .....	86
4.4.14 Social exclusion and relations with other groups .....	87
4.4.15 Visions for the future .....	88
4.5 Conclusions and recommendations .....	90
Chapter 5: Otjozondjupa Region .....	93
5.1 Introduction .....	93
5.2 Nyae Nyae Conservancy .....	95
5.2.1 General background on Nyae Nyae Conservancy .....	95
5.2.2 Research sites in Nyae Nyae Conservancy – Tsumkwe,   Xa hoba, N#animh .....	99
5.2.3 Research findings in Nyae Nyae Conservancy .....	104
Livelihoods and poverty .....	104
Perceptions of poverty .....	117
Access to land .....	118
Identity, culture and heritage .....	119
Relationships with other groups .....	120
Education .....	121
Health .....	124
Gender .....	126
Political participation and representation .....	127
Visions for the future .....	129
Impact of external support .....	131
Living in villages compared to living in Tsumkwe .....	137
Food production .....	138
Education .....	139
Land rights .....	139
Role of the conservancy .....	139
5.2.4 Conclusions and recommendations on Nyae Nyae Conservancy .....	138
5.3 N#ã Jaqna Conservancy .....	140
5.3.1 General background on N#ã Jaqna Conservancy .....	140
5.3.2 Research sites in N#ã Jaqna Conservancy – Mangetti Dune, Luhebo, Omatako .....	144
5.3.3 Research findings in N#ã Jaqna Conservancy .....	146
Livelihoods and poverty .....	146
Perceptions of poverty .....	156

Access to land .....	157
Identity, culture and heritage .....	160
Relationships with other groups .....	161
Education .....	161
Health .....	163
Gender .....	164
Political representation and participation .....	165
Changes in quality of life over time and vision for the future .....	168
Impact of N̄a Jaqna Conservancy .....	169
External support provided to the conservancy .....	170
5.3.4 Conclusions and recommendations on N̄a Jaqna Conservancy .....	170
5.4 Nyae Nyae and N̄a Jaqna Conservancies compared .....	172
<b>Chapter 6: Kunene, Oshana and Oshikoto Regions .....</b>	<b>173</b>
6.1 General background .....	173
6.1.1 Kunene Region .....	175
6.1.2 Oshana Region .....	176
6.1.3 Oshikoto Region .....	178
6.2 Research sites in the three regions .....	179
6.2.1 Etosha Poort in Outjo .....	179
6.2.2 Okaukuejo (Etosha) .....	181
6.2.3 Tsintsabis .....	183
6.2.4 Farm Six .....	185
6.2.5 Oshivelo .....	187
6.3 Research findings .....	188
6.3.1 Livelihoods and poverty .....	188
6.3.2 Access to land .....	202
6.3.3 Identity, culture and heritage .....	210
6.3.4 Relationships with other groups .....	211
6.3.5 Education .....	212
6.3.6 Health .....	216
6.3.7 Gender .....	220
6.3.8 Political participation and representation .....	223
6.3.9 Changes over time and visions for the future .....	227
6.3.10 Impact of external support .....	228
6.4 Regional conclusions and recommendations .....	231
<b>Chapter 7: Ohangwena Region .....</b>	<b>233</b>
7.1 General background .....	233
7.2 The San in Ohangwena Region .....	235
7.3 Research sites in Ohangwena Region .....	237
7.3.1 Ouholamo, Eenhana .....	238
7.3.2 Ekoka .....	239
7.3.3 Oshikoha, Okongo Community Forest and Conservancy .....	240
7.3.4 Onane .....	241
7.3.5 Omiishi, Omundaungilo .....	242
7.3.6 Omukukutu .....	242
7.4 Research findings .....	243
7.4.1 Livelihood and poverty .....	243
7.4.2 Access to land .....	254
7.4.3 Identity, culture and heritage .....	256
7.4.4 Relations with other groups .....	258
7.4.5 Education .....	260
7.4.6 Health .....	264
7.4.7 Gender .....	270
7.4.8 Political participation and representation .....	271
7.4.9 Changes over time and visions for the future .....	275
7.4.10 Impact of external support .....	279
7.5 Regional conclusions and recommendations .....	284
7.5.1 Conclusions .....	284
7.5.2 Recommendations .....	287

<b>Chapter 8: Omusati Region</b>	<b>289</b>
8.1 General background	289
8.2 The San in Omusati Region	291
8.3 Research sites in Omusati Region	293
8.3.1 Okatseidhi	293
8.3.2 Amarika	295
8.3.3 Okathakanguti	296
8.3.4 Okapya	296
8.4 Research findings	297
8.4.1 Livelihoods and poverty	297
8.4.2 Access to land	310
8.4.3 Identity, culture and heritage	310
8.4.4 Relationships with other groups	311
8.4.5 Education	312
8.4.6 Health	315
8.4.7 Gender	319
8.4.8 Political participation and representation	320
8.4.9 Human rights awareness	323
8.4.10 Changes over time and visions for the future	323
8.5 Conclusions and recommendations	325
8.5.1 Conclusions	325
8.5.2 Recommendations	327
<b>Chapter 9: Kavango Region</b>	<b>329</b>
9.1 General background	329
9.2 The San in Kavango Region	332
9.3 Research sites in Kavango Region	334
9.3.1 Likwaterera	334
9.3.2 Wiwi	336
9.3.3 Xeidang	337
9.3.4 Ndama neighbourhood, Rundu	337
9.4 Research findings	339
9.4.1 Livelihoods and poverty	339
9.4.2 Access to land	346
9.4.3 Identity, culture and heritage	349
9.4.4 Relationships with other groups	350
9.4.5 Education	352
9.4.6 Health	354
9.4.7 Gender	356
9.4.8 Political participation	357
9.4.9 Changes over time and visions for the future	359
9.4.10 Impact of external support	361
9.5 Regional conclusions and recommendations	363
<b>Chapter 10: Bwabwata National Park</b>	<b>365</b>
10.1 General background	365
10.2 The San in Bwabwata National Park	367
10.2.1 The Khwe	367
10.2.2 The !Xun	368
10.3 Research sites in Bwabwata	369
10.3.1 Mushashane	370
10.3.2 Mushangara	371
10.3.3 Omega I	371
10.3.4 Mashambo	372
10.4 Research findings	373
10.4.1 Livelihoods and poverty	373
10.4.2 Access to land	381
10.4.3 Identity, culture and heritage	382
10.4.4 Relationships with other groups	383



10.4.5	Education .....	384
10.4.6	Health .....	387
10.4.7	Gender .....	387
10.4.8	Political participation and representation .....	389
10.4.9	Visions for the future .....	393
10.4.10	Impact of external support .....	394
10.4.11	Living in the Bwabwata National Park .....	396
10.5	Conclusions and recommendations .....	398
<b>Chapter 11: Caprivi Region .....</b>		<b>399</b>
11.1	General background .....	399
11.2	The San in Caprivi Region .....	401
11.3	Research sites in Caprivi Region .....	402
11.3.1	Mulanga .....	403
11.3.2	Dam/Bito .....	404
11.3.3	Waya-Waya West .....	405
11.3.4	Makaravan .....	406
11.3.5	Kyarecan .....	407
11.4	Research findings .....	409
11.4.1	Livelihoods and poverty .....	409
11.4.2	Access to land .....	415
11.4.3	Identity, culture and heritage .....	415
11.4.4	Relationships with other groups .....	415
11.4.5	Education .....	416
11.4.6	Health .....	417
11.4.7	Gender .....	418
11.4.8	Political participation and representation .....	418
11.4.9	Visions for the future .....	420
11.4.10	Impact of external support .....	421
11.5	Regional conclusions and recommendations .....	422
<b>Chapter 12: San Farmworkers .....</b>		<b>423</b>
12.1	Introduction .....	423
12.2	Background on farming in Namibia .....	424
12.3	Impacts of the introduction of labour laws and the minimum wage agreement on San farmworkers .....	427
12.4	Living and working conditions of San farmworkers .....	429
12.5	Access to land .....	433
12.6	Conclusions .....	434

## **Part III**

# **National Analysis, Conclusion and Recommendations .....**

## **435**

<b>Chapter 13: Access to Land .....</b>		<b>437</b>
13.1	Introduction .....	437
13.2	San in different tenure systems .....	441
13.2.1	San on the commercial or communal farms of other people .....	441
13.2.2	San in urban informal settlements .....	442
13.2.3	San in communal areas where the majority of residents belong to other ethnic groups .....	443
13.2.4	San in national parks .....	446
13.2.5	San on MLR group resettlement projects .....	448
13.2.6	Group resettlement under the Office of the Prime Minister .....	452
13.2.7	San in conservancies .....	454
13.3	Recommendations .....	456

<b>Chapter 14: Livelihoods, Food Security and Poverty</b>	<b>465</b>
14.1 Introduction	465
14.2 Current livelihoods strategies	466
14.2.1 Pensions and social welfare grants	467
14.2.2 Food aid	468
14.2.3 Casual work and piecework	468
14.2.4 Employment	470
14.2.5 Gathering veldfood and hunting	471
14.2.6 Subsistence crop production	472
14.2.7 Livestock	473
14.2.8 Small businesses and trade-based income-generating activities	474
14.2.9 Sale of natural products (informally)	474
14.2.10 Sale of crafts (informally)	474
14.2.11 Income-generation activities (IGAs) with external support	475
14.2.12 Other tourism-related activities	479
14.3 Wealth and poverty among the San in Namibia	479
14.3.1 San living in extreme poverty	480
14.3.2 Food insecurity	481
14.3.3 Determinants of the socio-economic status of San households	482
14.4 Coping with food insecurity	484
14.4.1 General coping strategies	484
14.4.2 Fostering children	486
14.4.3 Alcohol	487
14.5 The role of external support for San livelihoods	487
14.5.1 The San Feeding Programme	487
14.5.2 Income-generating projects	487
14.5.3 Crop-production projects	488
14.5.4 Livestock projects	491
14.5.5 Increasing San employment	491
14.6 Conclusions and recommendations	492
14.6.1 General conclusions and recommendations	492
14.6.2 Specific recommendations	496
<b>Chapter 15: Culture, Discrimination and Development</b>	<b>503</b>
15.1 Introduction	504
15.2 San perceptions of cultural differences and social exclusion	507
15.3 Similarities between San cultures	509
15.4 Cultural considerations regarding development	512
15.4.1 Immediate return	513
15.4.2 Sharing	514
15.4.3 Leadership	515
15.4.4 Language	516
15.4.5 Access to land	516
15.4.6 Mobility	516
15.5 Recommendations	518
15.5.1 Promoting intercultural sensitivity	518
15.5.2 Language, remoteness, mobility and access to public institutions and services	519
<b>Chapter 16: Education</b>	<b>523</b>
16.1 Introduction	523
16.1.1 Education as a right	525
16.1.2 Education and language policy in Namibia	526
16.1.3 Overview of San Study findings	528
16.1.4 Specific efforts targeting San learners	528
16.2 Barriers to San participation in formal education	529
16.2.1 Poverty	529
16.2.2 Discrimination	531
16.2.3 Remote location of villages	532

16.2.4	Cultural mismatch .....	533
16.2.5	Inappropriate curricula .....	535
16.2.6	Lack of role models .....	535
16.2.7	Teenage pregnancies .....	535
<b>16.3</b>	<b>Other educational issues .....</b>	<b>536</b>
16.3.1	Early Childhood Development .....	536
16.3.2	Tertiary education .....	537
16.3.3	Adult education .....	540
<b>16.4</b>	<b>Factors contributing to a successful formal education .....</b>	<b>541</b>
<b>16.5</b>	<b>External support for San education .....</b>	<b>541</b>
<b>16.6</b>	<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>543</b>
16.6.1	Policies .....	543
16.6.2	Learning environment .....	543
16.6.3	Alternative approaches .....	544
<b>16.7</b>	<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>544</b>
16.7.1	Policy level .....	544
16.7.2	Welcoming learning environment .....	545
16.7.3	Alternative approaches .....	546
<b>Chapter 17: Health .....</b>	<b>547</b>	
<b>17.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>547</b>
<b>17.2</b>	<b>Common diseases among the San .....</b>	<b>549</b>
17.2.1	HIV/AIDS .....	549
17.2.2	Tuberculosis .....	550
17.2.3	Malaria .....	551
17.2.4	Gastro-intestinal diseases .....	552
<b>17.3</b>	<b>Government support and access to health services .....</b>	<b>552</b>
17.3.1	Distance to healthcare services .....	553
17.3.2	Costs of public healthcare services .....	553
<b>17.4</b>	<b>Discrimination and access to health .....</b>	<b>554</b>
<b>17.5</b>	<b>Traditional/indigenous medicine .....</b>	<b>554</b>
<b>17.6</b>	<b>Maternal health and teenage pregnancy .....</b>	<b>555</b>
<b>17.7</b>	<b>Water and sanitation .....</b>	<b>556</b>
<b>17.8</b>	<b>Malnutrition .....</b>	<b>556</b>
<b>17.9</b>	<b>Alcohol use .....</b>	<b>557</b>
<b>17.10</b>	<b>Support from NGOs and other external groups .....</b>	<b>558</b>
17.10.1	Namibia Red Cross Society (NRCS) .....	558
17.10.2	Health Poverty Action (HPA) / Health Unlimited .....	559
17.10.3	Other NGOs .....	559
17.10.4	Volunteer groups and individuals .....	559
<b>17.11</b>	<b>Conclusion and recommendations .....</b>	<b>560</b>
<b>Chapter 18: Gender .....</b>	<b>561</b>	
<b>18.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>561</b>
<b>18.2</b>	<b>The transition of San gender relations and gender values in Namibia .....</b>	<b>563</b>
18.2.1	Gender relations influenced by conservative Christian values .....	564
18.2.2	Gender relations influenced by work on farms .....	565
18.2.3	Gender relations influenced by neighbouring ethnic groups .....	566
18.2.4	Gender relations influenced by the South African army .....	567
<b>18.3</b>	<b>Current gender and generational relations within San communities .....</b>	<b>567</b>
18.3.1	Household arrangements .....	568
18.3.2	Livelihood strategies and the division of labour .....	569
18.3.3	Access to, and control over, resources .....	575
18.3.4	Inheritance practices .....	578
18.3.5	Poverty .....	578
18.3.6	Health .....	579
18.3.7	Education .....	581



18.3.8	Gender-based violence .....	583
18.3.9	Participation in decision making and representation .....	587
<b>18.4</b>	<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>590</b>
<b>18.5</b>	<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>593</b>
<b>Chapter 19:</b>	<b>Consultation, Participation and Representation .....</b>	<b>595</b>
19.1	Introduction .....	596
19.2	Principles of consultation and participation .....	596
19.2.1	Consultation procedures .....	597
19.3	Namibian San and the consultation process .....	599
19.4	San participation and representation in mainstream politics .....	600
19.4.1	National level .....	601
19.4.2	Regional and local government .....	602
19.4.3	Political alienation .....	603
19.5	The challenges for representative structures outside mainstream politics in San communities .....	604
19.5.1	Internal leadership structures in the past .....	604
19.5.2	The legacy of colonial politics, including land dispossession, social fragmentation, low levels of education, and marginalisation .....	605
19.5.3	Lack of a common San identity .....	606
19.6	Representative structures .....	607
19.6.1	Traditional authorities (TAs) .....	607
19.6.2	Namibian San Council .....	609
19.7	Participation and representation in other national and international bodies .....	610
19.7.1	Division of San Development in the Office of the Prime Minister .....	610
19.7.2	Participation and representation within southern Africa .....	610
19.7.3	Participation in international fora and conferences .....	611
19.8	Recommendations .....	613
19.8.1	Consultation with San people .....	613
19.8.2	San participation and representation in mainstream politics .....	614
19.8.3	Representative structures .....	615
<b>Chapter 20:</b>	<b>Overall Conclusion .....</b>	<b>617</b>
<b>Annex A:</b>	<b>Sites visited for the field research .....</b>	<b>631</b>
<b>Annex B:</b>	<b>Stakeholder interviews .....</b>	<b>632</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>		<b>633</b>
<b>Acronyms and Abbreviations .....</b>		<b>649</b>

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**Ute Dieckmann, Maarit Thiem, Erik Dirks, Jennifer Hays**  
Editors



# Foreword

The San, the first people to inhabit southern Africa, represent a 100 000-year-old culture which should be considered one of the world's treasures. Their DNA incorporates an unbroken chain of wisdom, knowledge of nature and community.

I had the pleasure of visiting Namibia and meeting some of its San people in 2010 after finding out that I, like many others in Africa, have a distinct genetic lineage from these people who have walked upon the soils of southern Africa for so many centuries.

Namibia, with the second largest population of San people, and such a rich and diverse range of peoples and cultures, has the wonderful distinction of some of the most enduring branches of our human family – something that I found widely recognised by Namibians and their government.

Nevertheless I am aware of the continued struggle that many of these people, including the San, still face to live dignified lives free from poverty and discrimination, with access to education, healthcare and other services for themselves and their children.

Every country needs a model of development which works for their own situation, and I hope this comprehensive report will assist the people of Namibia to make further tangible progress to ensure that the human rights, cultures, languages and livelihoods of all of the people of Africa are respected, especially its oldest inhabitants.

Wherever we are in the world, and however we look, we are members of one family – God's family. In accepting this fact we press forward together in our goal to ensure that all people are able to embrace the rights and opportunities to which they are entitled.



**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**  
Cape Town, South Africa

# Preface

The date 9 February 1990 marked a milestone in the short history of the Namibian nation. The people of Namibia declared that they “*desire to promote amongst all of us the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Namibian nation among and in association with the nations of the world*” (Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, 1990).

The dignity sought can only be attained if all basic necessities of life – chiefly food, housing, work, water, sanitation, health care and education – are adequately and equitably available to everyone. These rights are all essentials in fighting poverty.

This study on the San of Namibia has again brought to light the need for a more broad-based approach involving all stakeholders, through participatory democracy, a legal framework for the recognition and enforcement of the rights of indigenous and marginalised peoples, and the establishment of a mechanism for participation and consultation. Such legal framework must be based on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Namibia has endorsed, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, which I hope Namibia will ratify soon.

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

Finally, this study report is not only special but also much needed, and I commend the researchers and authors.



**Advocate John R. Walters**  
Ombudsman, Republic of Namibia

# Executive Summary

Namibia's San population constitutes about 2% of the national population. Numbering between 27 000 and 38 000 people in total, the overarching category known as “San”, denoting former hunter-gatherer communities, includes several different ethnic groups with distinct languages and dialects. Despite this diversity, many features are common to all the groups, including languages characterised by ‘click’ sounds. In general, San individuals identify themselves according to their ethnic group, i.e. Jul’hoansi, !Xun, Hai||om, Naro, Khwe or !Xoon, rather than as “San”, which is, like “Bushmen”, an external term. A handful of smaller San communities in northern Namibia have lost their language completely and now speak the language/s of their neighbouring ethnic group/s.

The San live on commercial farms, in the corridors between these farms, on resettlement farms, in communal areas among other stronger ethnic groups, in conservancies or community forests, in national parks and in urban townships. The socio-economic situations in which San groups/families/individuals currently live differ in many respects, depending primarily on the geographical region and the form of land tenure. Their livelihood strategies vary, depending on their socio-economic context. Despite these variations, all of the San groups share both a history and current experience of marginalisation. The level of poverty of the San is unmatched by that of any other group in Namibia. In the Human Development Index they are ranked at 0.35, whereas the national average is 0.55. The per capita income of the San is the lowest of all groups in Namibia, with an annual average adjusted per capita income of N\$3 263 compared to the national average of N\$10 358 (Levine 2007: 16).

In 2001, 11 years after Namibia became an independent state, the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) published a comprehensive study report, compiled by James Suzman, entitled *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia*. The study drew the following conclusion:

“A decade after independence, San stand out due to their dependency, extreme poverty, political alienation and a variety of social, educational and health problems. Of course, these problems are not unique to San, and many other Namibians are just as poor and marginalised as they are. However, what makes San conspicuous among Namibia’s poor is the fact that while only a proportion of the members of each other language group are extremely poor, San are almost universally extremely poor.” (Suzman 2001:143)

Since the publication of the Suzman report, diverse development initiatives aimed at reducing the San communities’ severe poverty have been implemented or initiated. The Namibian Government has taken a number of measures to end the discrimination of San communities and address their depressed socio-economic situation. Most important of these is the San Development Programme (SDP) established in late 2005, run by the Division of San Development in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Also, many NGOs have increased their support for San over the last decade.

The study reported on herein was initiated in 2010 with the aim of reassessing the situation of the San two decades after Namibia’s Independence. The overall objective is to provide livelihood assessments of the different San groups in Namibia to help the stakeholders – including the OPM, line ministries, NGOs and development partners – to ultimately develop a San-driven advocacy agenda. The findings can also help to improve the quality of the design and implementation of projects.



The study was undertaken in cooperation with the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN), and was funded by the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA), the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation) (AECID), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Society for International Cooperation) (GIZ), Afrikagrupperna (Africa Groups of Sweden) (AGS), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (Church Development Service) (EED) and Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) (BfdW) contributed to the study by way of their continuous financial support to the LAC's Land, Environment and Development (LEAD) Project over the years. The Centrum für Internationale Migration und Entwicklung (Centre for International Migration and Development) (CIM) contributed to the study by funding the position of an integrated expert.

The research team visited 42 sites in Caprivi, Kavango, Kunene, Omaheke, Ohangwena, Omusati, Otjozondjupa, Oshana and Oshikoto Regions.<sup>1</sup> The selection of sites was based on specific criteria. Two to five team members were assigned to each site, where they usually stayed for two-and-a-half days. The team selected a set of participatory research methods to be used in the field, and underwent training in participatory research. Focus group discussions (FGDs) supplemented the participatory research methods. Gender and culture were cross-cutting issues covered in most of the FGDs. The research methodology also included stakeholder interviews and a literature review. After the field research, the team held 10 workshops (from October 2012 to April 2013) to discuss the preliminary findings of the field research with representatives of the San communities visited as well as government and NGO representatives.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Part I:** This part provides the background and context of the “San Study”. Chapter 1 presents the purpose of the study, the research methodology used and the major problems encountered with quantitative data on San in Namibia. Chapter 2 presents the legal framework in Namibia, and Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the San communities in Namibia, their history, and their development since 1990 when Namibia became an independent state (hereinafter referred to simply as “Independence”). In Chapter 3, special attention is given to the main stakeholders in San support initiatives in the last 12 years.
- **Part II:** This part, comprising the bulk of the report, consists of chapters covering the regions in which most of the San communities live – in other words these chapters are arranged by region rather than by San group. In this general arrangement there are four deviations:
  - Kunene, Oshikoto and Oshana (specifically Etosha) are covered in a single chapter, because most of the San inhabitants of these regions are Hai||om, and their circumstances are similar.
  - The Khwe living in the Bwabwata National Park (Caprivi/Kavango) are discussed in a separate chapter, because the socio-economic context of Bwabwata is not comparable to other areas where San live in Caprivi and Kavango.
  - The Nyae Nyae and Nǃa Jaqna Conservancies in Otjozondjupa Region also merit separate treatment to allow for exploring the particularities of the conservancy situation.
  - The status of San farmworkers merits a separate chapter.
- **Part III:** This final part presents comparisons, conclusions and recommendations with regard to the most important aspects of the current status of San in Namibia. In each case, we present regional comparisons, analyse similarities and differences between the San communities and

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of editing this report in August 2013, the name *Caprivi* Region was changed to *Zambezi* Region, and *Kavango* Region was split into two regions, namely *Kavango East* and *Kavango West*. As all of our research was conducted prior to these changes, we have retained the names *Caprivi* Region and *Kavango* Region in this report.

their socio-economic setups, draw conclusions about the impact of San support initiatives over the last decade, and put forward specific recommendations. These aspects are:

- access to land;
- livelihoods, food security and poverty;
- culture, discrimination and development;
- education;
- health;
- gender; and
- consultation, participation and representation.

In the concluding chapter, we identify the key factors contributing to the ongoing marginalisation and poverty of San communities in Namibia, and provide overall recommendations for future support of San communities in Namibia.

This study has shown that despite the efforts to ameliorate the situation of San communities, the perception of many San in Namibia in 2013 is that they are “left behind” or “scraping the pot” – as the title of this report reflects – and indeed, we found that the vast majority of Namibia’s San do experience serious marginalisation. This is manifested in poverty and food insecurity, a lack of secure access to land and natural resources, a lack of education, a lack of access to services, discrimination and limited political representation.

The widespread poverty among the San is attributable to numerous factors which are interrelated and partly conditional upon each other. The analyses of the study findings brought to light the key factors:

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

The participatory approach employed in the study made it possible to identify many reasons for the lack of success of government and NGO initiatives aimed at reducing the levels of San marginalisation and poverty. Major cross-cutting issues (i.e. issues relevant to all regions and all topics covered in this report) are *the lack of*:

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

In this regard the following interventions are recommended, based on the study findings:

- ***Development of an integrated development strategy:*** Currently, different stakeholders, taking different approaches, impose different development strategies on San communities. Some of these strategies are more effective and more appropriate than others, but in any case, this lack of coordination is generally problematic. Without an integrated strategy, initiatives supporting San will remain patchy and rather ineffective, and stakeholders will continue to risk impeding each

other's efforts. A **specific policy on indigenous peoples/marginalised communities in Namibia** would be a major step towards addressing these concerns. This policy would give stakeholders a common set of guidelines to direct their development efforts, and would inculcate a rights-based approach to development. Further, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has recommended that Namibia ratify **ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples** (ILO169) (see ACHPR and IWGIA 2008: 26). This would be a major step forward, and could go hand in hand with the above-mentioned policy. Along with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO169 would reinforce the protection and recognition of indigenous minorities at national level (see also ACHPR and IWGIA 2008: 26). Furthermore, ILO169 and UNDRIP provide frameworks for Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which could go a long way to addressing the shortcomings in consultation, empowerment, cultural sensitivity and organisational capacity described in detail in this report.

- **Improving coordination:** A **National Coordinating Forum on Indigenous Peoples/Marginalised Communities** should be formed to ensure integrated multi-sectoral coordinated and systematic development in line with the above-mentioned integrated strategy. This body should be composed of representatives of the San TAs and the Namibian San Council, the SDP in the OPM, the relevant line ministries, national NGOs (i.e. members of the San Support Organisations' Association of Namibia) and international development partners. Further, **Regional Coordinating Committees on Indigenous Peoples/Marginalised Communities** could be established to deal in more detail with the specific problems of the San in each region. Such committees should include representatives of the SDP in the OPM, regional councils, line ministries, NGOs working with the San in each region, San TAs and/or other TAs under whose jurisdiction the San live, regional representatives of the Namibian San Council and representatives of San CBOs. Regional coordination could also be strengthened through improved information exchange within the existing Regional Development Coordinating Committees. To ensure San participation, funds would have to be allocated for transporting and accommodating the San attendees of the meetings of the coordinating bodies at both national and regional level.
- **Improving monitoring and evaluation:** Quantitative data is essential for adequately evaluating, in detail, poverty-reduction and other development efforts. Quantitative data would also be a means to compare the wellbeing of San communities with that of other Namibian communities. Undeniably, 23 years after Independence, ethnic affiliations still play a role in the redistribution of wealth and resources. Quantitative data on the basis of language categories as provided by the National Planning Commission and the Namibia Statistics Agency do not reliably capture socio-economic differences between ethnic groups, e.g. the various San groups and the Himba (another marginalised indigenous group in Namibia). Only the government can provide comprehensive and reliable quantitative data, and we urge the government to: (a) include in the census and various surveys questionnaires one question on ethnic affiliation; and (b) analyse specific data accordingly, or otherwise make the data accessible to others for analysis.

The aim of this report is to provide a solid basis for future policy, programmes and projects for *and with* San communities in Namibia, in order to finally ensure that San communities have equal opportunities and enjoy equal rights in Namibian society. The study shows that the situation is complex, and that factors influencing the current marginalisation of the San are interrelated and conditional upon each other. It has also made clear that concerted efforts are needed. Eventually, improving the situation will depend on the political will and commitment of the Government of Namibia, the commitment and capacity of civil society, and last but not least, the initiative and advocacy of the San themselves.