

(2002) *Minorities in The Millennium?
Perspectives from Botswana*
ed. Isaac N. Mazonde
Gaborone: Lightbooks

pp 57-71

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THE SAN IN BOTSWANA AND THE ISSUE OF SUBJECTIVITIES — NATIONAL DISINTEGRATION OR CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

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Botswana has come a long way from the stance it cherished three decades back at Independence when Setswana language was the only official vernacular, much to the dismay of many citizens to whom it was as alien as English. Recently, less than a decade back, the thinking among the most senior policy makers in the country is that the time has come for officially recognising the languages of the so-called minority tribes. The matter does not begin and end with language; it has wider implications. Included within its ambit is freedom of expression of the different cultures that make up Botswana.

Botswana has not just matured into this tolerance of its diverse cultural groups without pressure from outside. Pressure has been brought to bear from surrounding countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, which received their independence much later, but have nonetheless upheld multiculturalism within their communities. The racial relations among peoples of these countries may not necessarily be perfect, but it is the recognition of cultural diversity and tolerance of differences in ethnicities that is commendable. South Africa, for instance, has gone to the extent of granting its San community a geographically recognisable space, Bushmanland, where they are able to exercise self determination.

While Botswana is clearly moving towards accommodating the various cultures of its different people, its policy regarding the San may be different. The country's policy seeks to integrate the San into the culture(s) of the mainstream Batswana. But then, whereas there are differences between the cultures of the various ethnic groups in the country, cultural differences are greatest between the San on the one hand, and the rest of Batswana on the other. The way the Government has dealt with the San within this complex social set up has been interpreted by some as a reactionary move. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how this move by the Government of Botswana is simultaneously reactionary and progressive, and furthermore to show how this paradox epitomises the complexity of the concept of social development. The complexity of social development is highlighted further when I account for changes of attitudes by the San themselves, who at sometimes deny their ethnicity only to claim it vigorously at other times.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on perceptions towards the San and the perceptions of the San towards non-San mainstream population groups. Perceptions are one of the most important aspects of social or man-centred development, particularly with respect to indigenous people. Perceptions are a crucial aspect of the life of the San because the plight of these people is to a large extent attitudinal in nature; it hinges on the way they are perceived and treated by the mainstream or dominant non-San communities, most of whom are the so called 'blacks'.¹ The way the San perceive themselves is also important but is to a large extent a direct result of the manner in which they are regarded and dealt with by others, mainly the non-San. In view of that, any viable change of attitude in favour of the San must originate with and be initiated by the dominant non-San peoples, who deny the San the cen-

tral credos of democracy, namely freedom, autonomy, and the right to be different. As I shall demonstrate later, the last credo, the right to be different, is denied the San mainly by the state. The aim of this paper is to expose some of the processes that construct such denials.

THE ETHNICITY FACTOR IN PERCEPTION

One of the recommendations of the San Conference held in Gaborone in 1993 was that the way to reverse the negative stigma of the San was to empower them economically. On the basis of available evidence, this approach might not work out as easily as it was assumed. Good has indicated that in a few cases the San once owned livestock and tilled fields, but were dispossessed of their livestock by the dominant non-San Tswana communities who subsequently subjugated them (Good, 1999). Although in a related discussion Saugestad makes reference to a commonly known distinction between the San and the Khoe (Saugestad, 1997:18), my conclusion is that both are indigenous, and are stigmatised and subjugated peoples. Both are powerless before the 'blacks'. My point is that efforts to empower the San are bound to fail as long as the stigma and the powerlessness that is responsible for the contempt with which they are held by the dominant groups remains. Thus, the first thing to address in all genuine efforts aimed to assist the San is the ethnicity issue, which underlies the negativity against the San. In this regard, it is essential to keep in mind the covert but fundamental difference between the San and non-San in reference to Botswana's remote area dwellers.²

The ethnicity issue is related closely to that of the term 'indigenous'. Although the Botswana Government takes the view that all natural Batswana are indigenous, the San are widely regarded as an indigenous group wherever they are found. The International Labour Organization in its 'Convention No 169' refers to indigenous people as 'tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations' (Kipuri, 1999:19). Across the world, indigenous peoples have a special attachment to land. They have their own language or languages, their own social institutions, consensual decision making processes, community life and collective sharing.

A common experience among the indigenous people anywhere is that their land and territories, as well as cultural institutions, are violated by states and global forces through acts of domination (Kipuri, 1999:21). This definition is not, however, useful for identifying the poverty and marginalization aspects of the Botswana San. It is useful, in the Botswana set up, to consider the word 'indigenous' in a broader sense in order to take into account the experiences of other people whose lives reflect similar experiences with those who have been identified as the San or 'indigenous' and who regard themselves as such. In a few instances, some people who live with the San in the remote areas, such as the Ovaherero for example, consider themselves not only as the remote area dwellers, but more importantly as the San. In other words, there are both differences as well as similarities, and indeed overlaps among remote area dwellers. A related fact is that while in general the remote areas have too little infrastructure and other forms of development, they are at the same time very productive areas for the livestock owned by non-San cattle barons who live in the large villages and are from the dominant mainstream Tswana communities. The residents of the remote areas are the herders of these vast numbers of cattle. Thus, the wealth of their areas is not in their hands but in those of others.

The problems experienced by the San were typical 'indigenous peoples-problems' (Saugestad 1998:17). In view of that, it is expedient to interrogate the term 'indigenous' *vis-à-vis* 'ethnicity'. According to Saugestad, 'ethnicity is a cultural construct assigning social meaning to some diacritical signs, while ignoring others. In its most elementary sense, ethnicity refers to social relationships where basic classificatory differences between categories of people are perceived to be important, and made relevant in interaction. Ethnicity is created and re-created in social situations and encounters' (Saugestad, 1998:45).

Saugestad goes further and draws some link between ethnicity and class: 'ethnicity is not synonymous with class but the two often coincide. Marxist theory stresses the relationship to property in class ranking while the Weberian theory of social stratification combines criteria such as income, education and political influence to delineate classes' (Saugestad, 1998:50). Later, I pursue the Weberian theory in my discussion of education. Suffice it to note, for now, that the two concepts of 'indigenous' and 'ethnicity' complement each other, as the situation of indigenous peoples must be understood as the outcome of a process of interaction between ethnic groups.

Thus, for the San, the situation of being indigenous, which confers an inferior social status, combines with the negative aspects of ethnicity to bring about a stigma that is aggravated by the additional fact that the San are a people of the past who are placed in between the Stone Age and the Iron Age (Saugestad, 1998:60).

An historical account of how they were enlisted as serfs by the Ngwato might help set the stage for an explanation of their enduring stigmatised social position. The main tribes of Botswana found their place in the country in the past two centuries through dispersal, feuds and conquest. Clearly stratified socially (unlike the San who are an acephalous community), they then established themselves in certain parts of Botswana. As Tswana chiefdoms grew into well organised societies, three classes of people emerged: the commoners, foreigners and serfs, in that order. Commoners were non-royal members of the Tswana nuclear group. It included foreigners who had proved themselves loyal to the chief and the tribe. The foreigners were either immigrants or conquered groups who had not yet attained the status of commoner or who had no wish to meld their identity with that of the dominant Tswana group. Some were forced to become serfs rather than clients of the cattle owners. The San in particular were victims of a form of hereditary serfdom (Saugestad, 1998:109).

It is within this context that many people have asserted that the main problem for the San is that they are too much outside society, with too little influence on the decisions made by the society and the state. In her assessment of the inconvenience that the San pose to the apparent unity of the tribes in Botswana, Saugestad, referring to the word 'inconvenient' in the title of her book, notes that 'inconvenient' indicates an attitude that is rather dismissive, often condescending and ambivalent, but not overtly hostile. The term is not a description of a group, it denotes an attitude to the group (Saugestad, 1998:3).

But, as indicated earlier, this is not a situation generated by the laws of the land; rather, it is created by the interaction that has structured the relationship between the San and non-San.

THE ETHNICITY QUESTION WITHIN THE RAD SETTLEMENTS

The issue of negative attitudes towards the San is a difficult subject. The account given so far about the nature of the contempt in which San are held does not claim to be exhaustive. The issue of the sense of community as applied to the remote area dwellers, a collective term for the San and others

who live in the margins away from large settlements, merely adds to the complexity of the problem under discussion. The remote area dwellers (RADs) are made up of different peoples with varying ethnicities. Indeed, as Twyman notes for the Okwa Wildlife Management Area, another RAD set up, 'the concept of community is problematic in the context of the management and utilisation programme in the Okwa Wildlife Management Area. The concept of community has generally been viewed as the consensus on which community based sustainable development is predicated. However, communities are complex, dynamic and diffuse and the conventional conception therefore requires reformulation to take full account of the dynamics of social agency if this unit of analysis is to be useful in development initiatives' (Twyman, 1998:763).

Twyman describes the general picture of the social context within which community based development programmes are framed within the RAD setups in Botswana. In Zutshwa, as in many other RAD settlements of western Botswana, there are the San, different classes of the Bakgalagadi, and 'Batswana'. 'Batswana' come from the dominant major tribal groups. They are the group that is normally referred to as the 'blacks' by the San. The San almost always constitute the largest proportion of the RADs, yet they are hierarchically the lowest ethnic group in terms of resources, power and influence. RADs in a community consist of diverse groups of people, all of whom have very different incentives and motivations for resource use and employ differing livelihood strategies. Furthermore, the notions of community and community consensus mask the complexity and diversity of interests within such groups (Twyman, 1998:764). It is within this context that the other RADs, including the Bakgalagadi, have discriminated against the San and dominate them. This is easily done because although the RADs are generally poor, there is a variation in power and in resources within their communities. The San are the most vulnerable to abuse by any other social group. This is a factor that is responsible for their perpetual poverty and low status. As a result of this condition, development packages that sometimes work successfully to empower non-San RADs never work for the San, even within the same community. The Wildlife management Area programme which is discussed elsewhere in this section is a case in point.

The existence of the First People of the Kalahari (FPK) movement, which is made up of San and seeks redress against the injustice being committed against San, is clear indication of the important ethnic differences among RADs. It also shows a clear lack of a sense of community between the San and other RADs with whom they live.

An attempt will now be made to expand and contextualise the general observations made heretofore on San perceptions. The negative attitude towards the San is so deep rooted and widespread that it is evident not only at a personal and community level but at the state or government level as well. This simply means that the raw deal and lack of recognition that the San receive in their interactions with the dominant social groups at the individual level is sanctioned by communities and up-held by the state through the national institutions of the courts and governance. This is understandable when one adopts Saugestad's view which sees government both in its constitutional role as defining the policies of a sovereign state, and more loosely as representing the views of the majority of its people (Saugestad, 1998:3).

For example, at the individual level, the non-San cattle owners for whom the San work underpay them, ill treat them and sometimes sexually abuse San women, all with impunity. At the community level, the picture is no different. The mainstream Tswana tribes have amassed wealth through the exploitation of San labour. Ngwato wealth depended on the San (Wily, 1979:138) and the San suffered continued exclusion from the Ngwato family. Among the Ngwato and the Tswana, all San

living in a headman's hunting and grazing area came under the control of the headman. Their duties were gradually extended to include hunting, herding cattle, ploughing and other domestic work for their masters (Saugestad, 1998:110).

Today, the San may not necessarily be ploughing for their masters but they still herd for them and their situation has changed very little in other respects, even in the course of the implementation of RAD programmes which seek to reduce their exploitation by putting them in new settlements. Rivers has shown how the Community Based Natural Resources Management project (CBNRMP) has been designed to assist San earn income from wildlife in the remote areas (Rivers, 1999). As part of the CBNRMP, the Government also has two land use systems, the wildlife management areas (WMA) and the controlled hunting areas (CHA). The two represent two distinct super-imposed systems of legislation enabling land and resource use in Botswana. The WMA is a land use type, which specifies that the primary form of land use is wildlife management. In theory, this land use designation would appear to favour the San, who rely far more on hunting and gathering, than it would favour the Bakgalagadi, who keep livestock. In Zutshwa, however, it is the Bakgalagadi, another remote area non-San ethnic group, who actually benefit from the WMA programme at the expense of the San. This is because the WMA concept has the effect of taking away from the individual and the family the direct access to wildlife meat and wildlife products, as well as the flexibility of hunting according to the needs of individuals and families.

In the WMA concept, the rights to determine hunting and the use of natural resources is ceded to the community. In the course of this process, the benefits of the regulation that pools these resources are enjoyed by the most influential members of the community, to the disadvantage of the weak. Thus, the San, who are at the bottom rung of the social ladder among the RADs, end up losing even when they should have been the chief beneficiaries of the WMA by virtue of their life as hunters. This lowest social position translates into the lowest influence as well as the lowest self-worth. More crucially, as the next paragraph demonstrates, other RADs easily manipulate their San colleagues for their economic betterment. Also, the San have not demonstrated a willingness to profit from any non-San community through the manipulation of others.

In Diphuduhudu, Kweneng District, a non-San farmer from outside this remote area settlement waters his cattle in a borehole that is meant to water the livestock of the remote area dwellers only. The residents of Diphuduhudu are powerless to restrain him. He defies their orders for him to keep his cattle out of their borehole, using derogatory language to the effect that he cannot be ordered out of a borehole by 'bushmen'.

This case is significant because it provides the context within which non-San are able to appropriate for themselves, with impunity, goods and services which are provided exclusively for the benefit of the San at the community level. Underlying the weak position of the San is what has been underscored by Good in his discussion of the RAD settlements, who observes that although such settlements were created for occupation by San and other remote people, the Government still had no specific policies as to who should be allocated land for residence or be allowed to graze and water cattle there.

The fact that outside owners of large cattle herds can move on to West Hanahai (a settlement created specifically for the San in Ghanzi District), causing 'numerous problems for its Basarwa (San) residents including overtaxing the low yielding water supply and denuding the surrounding veld area', suggests that the problem of encroachment of the 'blacks' into settlements created for the San is widespread. Actually, Good has maintained that this is a general phenomenon: 'where

grazing and water existed, these are usually appropriated by outside cattle-men with the tacit or explicit consent of government, under the rubric of a citizen's freedom of movement in Botswana'. It is for this reason that 'domestic water sources have been turned into cattle watering points, and settlements into the equivalent of cattle posts'.

THE 1993 REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR AFRICA'S SAN/BASARWA POPULATIONS

Whereas the helplessness of the San has long been commonplace wherever they are, the recent situation has changed. The Conference on Development Programmes for Africa's San/Basarwa Populations convened in Gaborone, 11–13 September 1993 provided a watershed. The conference was convened by the Governments of Botswana and Namibia, following another one convened in Namibia the previous year. Both conferences were funded by the Governments of Norway and Sweden.

The 1992 conference had been regarded as not very successful because the delegation from Botswana did not include any San. The officials representing the Botswana Government appeared too defensive of the Government's position on the San issue in Botswana. Things changed during the 1993 conference. Preparatory meetings were held among the various San communities in Botswana, with the help of NGOs. The San themselves decided what issues they wanted discussed at the conference and who their representatives would be. Consequently, the 1993 conference can be taken as a critical turning point for the San in Botswana in that they spoke out their minds freely without any restraint from the Government. The views they expressed at this conference must therefore be taken seriously, as should be the resolutions reached at this conference.

However, before considering the views of the San and the resolutions of the conference, it is necessary to highlight the significance of the 1993 conference to the San themselves. First, the year 1993 had been declared the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Second, the UN had further proposed an international decade for the world's indigenous people. The UN was not the only supportive organization. NGOs and other international communities assisted in championing the cause of the San and other indigenous peoples of the world.

More importantly for the San in Botswana and Namibia, the 1993 conference provided an opportunity for them to have dialogue among themselves and between themselves and their respective Governments. The 1992 conference in Namibia had been the first of its kind to be held in the region. The conference had been intended to be a vehicle to facilitate communication between the San peoples of southern Africa, to share ideas on issues of common interest and the developmental challenges that face them as compared to their fellow compatriots. These same objectives were maintained for the 1993 conference.

The San expressed their views on a number of issues. For reasons of space, only a few will be highlighted here. Land was one issue of contention. They wanted to be given an area where they could live as they chose, in line with their culture, headed by a San chief who would also be a member of the House of Chiefs. With respect to communication, they complained that they never meet on any issue, because they do not know each other. San from Namibia explained that their problem is compounded by the fact that they are scattered over many farms which are far apart. San from both Botswana and Namibia said that the reason why non-San did not consult them was because of the contempt with which they are held by such people. In summary, the San called for a

right to self determination and human rights.

Many resolutions were passed. Again for lack of space, only a few of those that are relevant to this discussion will be reproduced. One of them relates to land. Resolution 7 states that: 'All communities (Basarwa/San included) need ownership, control over and access to land to preserve cultural identity and foster survival through agriculture, hunting and gathering'. Resolution 8(c) states that Basarwa/San people should be adequately represented in land allocation bodies (Land Boards). The final one to be raised here refers to education. Resolution 4 states: 'Education is recognised as a very important component of the development process. However, it does [not] in its current form take into account cultural norms and practices of San communities. It is resolved that mother tongue teaching be encouraged or introduced for the first three primary school grades'.

Today, six years later, none of the resolutions raised above have been implemented. Only *now* is UNICEF sponsoring a study by the University of Botswana (Directorate of Research and Development) to look into an educational curriculum that is appropriate for the San in the remote areas. A recommendation that has been taken up by the Government, and one that is not raised above, concerns the management of natural resources. The Botswana Government has put in a lot of effort in the management of natural resources, as will be indicated later in this paper.

Although the Botswana Government has not followed up on a number of resolutions made at the 1993 conference, the San have since become more united and more forceful in their claims for their rights. They have come a long way from being the docile people they used to be. The San are also able to achieve some economic success with community based projects, even though such success is very limited. For example, in the remote area of Cgae Cgae, where half the population is San, Rivers reports some success of the community based natural resource management CBNRM project. The community in Cgae Cgae succeeded in forcing the Government to put down a cordon fence in 1998, after the fence was seen to interfere with the movement of wild animals. She reports further that the residents of Cgae Cgae were also able to stand up to a non-San headman (Rivers, 1998).

CONTINUED DENIAL OF RIGHTS

Despite all that, there is evidence that the Botswana Government treats the San as second class citizens or as if they were not citizens at all. In this context, Saugestad talks of the mother country becoming a step mother to its minorities (Saugestad, 1998:33). The San have been denied constitutional rights to which every other Motswana has claim. Unlike every other Motswana, they have no territory, no recognised paramount chief except for the recently appointed headmen¹. Despite the resolution to provide them with land to live according to their culture, the San still have virtually no rights to land outside the recently created settlements where they are re-settled. In these settlements, the San are given small arable fields, averaging two acres. Collective land rights, such as grazing areas, are not available to them in amounts that are adequate for cattle raising. More importantly, they are not mentioned in the country's constitution. Given all that, it is no wonder that the San have not enjoyed the socio-economic development that Botswana has achieved in the past two decades of high economic growth. Actually, the San have fared worse than any other community in Botswana. They have become poorer economically and more so socially, through the state's relocation policies (Panos Oral Testimony Programme, 1998). What this means is that the San have not enjoyed any social development that might have resulted in the realisa-

tion of self-worth, the one ingredient that is expedient in determining attitudes.

The San perceive that they are being discriminated against by the dominant non-San peoples, including the state. In a discussion of the Community Based Natural Resource Management project (CBNRMP), Rivers states that the Khwai constitution of CBNRMP is different from others in that it ties membership to ethnicity. It is essentially for the San. Non-San can only become members if they apply to the board and are accepted by it. When non-San argued that this arrangement is discriminatory because it ties membership to ethnicity, a San retorted: 'how can this (deed) be discriminatory when the constitution itself is discriminatory against Basarwa (the San) by saying we don't exist?' (Rivers, 1998:21). In other words, this particular San is aware that San are not recognised by the country's constitution. In this context, it should be stated that Botswana's position, which takes a non-ethnic approach in all its policies, should not be an excuse for the country to ignore the special circumstances of the San, since this approach has the effect of denying the San their political rights.

The forced removal of the San from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) is another example of the base manner in which San are treated by the state. Good has touched on this matter in some detail (Good, 1999). What needs to be emphasised here is that this is generally a common experience among marginalised peoples. Kipuri states the situation for Africa as follows: 'forced relocation, plundering of resources, destruction of the natural environment, etc. are the human rights abuses that are familiar to indigenous peoples. The eviction of indigenous peoples from their territories in the name of management of those resources by states is common. All wildlife parks, particularly in eastern Africa have been created following evictions of indigenous peoples. The discovery of oils and precious stones almost always involves violation of the rights of indigenous peoples in order to benefit from resources in their areas ... development has meant development for others, not for indigenous peoples' (Kipuri, 1999:24).

There are several reasons that the Government may advance in support for its action which have the effect of marginalising the San. The Government has maintained that any policy that treats different ethnic groups separately would be akin to the apartheid policies practised in the former racist South Africa. At Independence, the Government deliberately turned a blind eye on ethnic differences within Botswana in a bid to create a unified nation. The ethnic diversity of the nation was under-communicated in the name of national unity during the formative years of the new state. The flaws in this reasoning have manifested themselves with time, especially since the past decade when state policies clearly had the effect of disadvantaging the San. Nor would the all-encompassing idea of globalization, which is the buzz concept of our times, appear to justify efforts to assimilate the San within the mainstream Tswana community. While globalization attempts to make all fit into one global village, it must leave room for differences. It was never meant to be a homogenising concept (Werbner, 1999). Actually, Botswana has come to acknowledge the wisdom of cultural diversity (Botswana Government, 1999).

However, such acknowledgement has not yet resulted in any tangible action. The feeling that the state does not recognise the San in the way it recognises other Batswana, has made them perceive that they could receive better assistance from people outside Botswana, given that foreign organizations have proved to take a greater interest in the San's welfare than does their own Government. For example, the San, through their late leader of the First People of the Kalahari (FPK) have been allowed a voice in the UN. They continue to have a voice even after the death of their former leader. Consequently, they regard current efforts of the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to be a sign that they have more support from the international community than from

Botswana. Hence, San perceive that it is only with assistance from outside Botswana that they can succeed in their fight for self recognition and constitutional as well as human rights.

FORMAL EDUCATION AMONG SAN CHILDREN

The education sector is another special area in which the San perceive that they are clearly discriminated against by the more powerful non-San Batswana. In this regard, the discussion will focus on the provision of formal education for the San children. While providing formal education to San children appears to alienate such children from their parents, who have never been exposed to education, it is indisputable that the acquisition of formal education does raise the social status of the recipient, even though it might not fully erase a stigma such as a lowly rated ethnicity. Equipped with formal education, people can work in respectable jobs at a professional level and achieve recognition. In this day and age, education offers the greatest opportunity not only for social mobility but also for the provision of the most reliable source of a livelihood. In a way, and at a certain economic level, formal education has become a substitute for land and cattle, the main factors of socio-economic control in earlier times when the San were dispossessed of their influence and dignity by the Batswana.

The impact of education on raising people's social status is best understood within the context of a discussion of the difference between class and elite. Socio-economic class is often hereditary, although social mobility which results from increase in economic resources may raise someone from one socio-economic class into another. Equally, loss of material endowment may occasion a lowering of someone's socio-economic class.

As indicated earlier, the Marxist view of class is based on property while the Weberian one brings in a number of factors including formal education. Formal education often makes its recipient a member of an elite. As opposed to class, which is often hereditary, the notion of eliteness connotes role. A person, as a member of an elite, is part of a high social level of society, such as a teacher, bank clerk, or other professional. These are role categories: it is only while they are acting in them that people carry respect. As soon as they leave the office, the honour ceases. By contrast, members of a high class retain honour all the time. They need not be acting or employed to receive social recognition. Having said that, it should also be stated that a member of an elite can transform his or her social status and enter into a higher class. Now, Botswana's approach to education since Independence has given a chance to all children in the major villagers, resulting in many instances of children from poor families acquiring positions in public life and virtually shifting classes upwards (Kann, 1991).⁵

Since formal education is instrumental in the making of an elite, it should be clear that it has a potential to reduce the force of the stigma of lowly rated groups, even though it might not dissolve the stigma completely. In some places, formal education is deliberately controlled in a quest to regulate or restrict inter-class mobility, thereby perpetuating the monopoly of membership of better-off socio-economic classes.

There is yet another important reason for focusing on formal education. The last few decades have witnessed a substantial move among the San away from foraging, with increasing reliance on domestic food production, occasional wage earning and welfare. This means that for their survival, the San must shift from the environmental concerns to bureaucratic concerns. The shift away from foraging is partly accounted for by the process of globalization which has affected virtually all parts

of the world, including places where the San have always lived. Simultaneously, the expanding cattle industry has reduced the San's access to and control over lands which previously provided a sustainable livelihood (Saugestad, 1998:89). These developments require that the San have formal education in order to fit into the world they are now living in. Against this background, this chapter will consider the acquisition of formal education by San children in Dobe, a RAD Settlement in Western Botswana.

Usually, San children are at the beginning of school terms collected by the Remote Area Development Officers (RADOs) from various nearby settlements where there is no school and ferried by District Council trucks, often against their will, to settlements where there are schools. Dobe is one such settlement where there is no school. The nearest school is in another settlement, some 20 kilometres away. In that settlement San children, along with the rest of the RAD children, live in very low quality hostels, usually sleeping on the ground. There have been reports of sexual harassment of female RAD pupils in these hostels by males who come from outside the school.

National Development Plan 7 noted that 'prevailing hostel conditions and modes of operation often make RAD parents reluctant to enrol their children in primary school and often contribute to student dropout. With appropriate intervention, these facilities can be changed from sub-standard boarding facilities into active learning, cultural and recreation centres' (Botswana Government, 1994). In fact, 88 per cent of the so called 'missing children' live in rural areas. Within this sub-group, non-enrolment, dropout, repetition, and sub-standard academic performance rates are highest among the RAD dwellers, 'especially among the non-Setswana speaking ethnic RADs of the western and north western districts for whom access to basic education has been limited due to poverty, distance from schools, cultural values and negative public attitudes' (Botswana Government, 1994:76).

In Dobe, as of January 1999, there were no San in either the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) committee or the Village Development Committee (VDC), the two organizations that deal with formal education at the village or settlement level. Both these social structures seemed to reinforce the prejudice that non-San, or the 'blacks' had about the San children and their parents. Learning is made difficult for San children by the non-San teachers, apparently with the hope that these San children will discontinue their formal education and go back to join their parents in the settlements of their origin.

San children complained that they were ill treated at schools and in the hostels. They reported that they were sometimes beaten up and berated for not learning, by the non-San teachers. Of course, it must be noted that San's learning problems are not caused only by the non-San teachers. There are different social groups among San. Occasionally there are clashes at school between the various San groups. For example, in one school 20 kilometres from Dobe, Ju'hoan pupils from one San group complained that the Xanikwe, who are their colleagues from another San group, urinated on their blankets deliberately, just to provoke them into a fight. In a related study, Good has indicated that with a total of 77 per cent illiteracy, the San are the least literate of all RAD people' (Good, 1999). The present paper basically shows how that situation is likely to continue for a while.

It should be noted also that although the 1993 conference resolved to encourage the use of mother tongue in the first years of primary education among remote area children, so far nothing has been done in this regard. Largely this is because of lack of San teachers. The vast majority of teachers in RAD settlements are from the 'black' community. In New Xade, for example, there is only one San teacher within a staff complement of 11 teachers.

However, in order to capture the sentiments of the San, which clearly reflect their perceptions of

non-San people, I reproduce, below, salient features from an interview between a researcher, Elizabeth Reynolds, and a San parent. The interview was recorded in February 1999.

Question: What is it that makes teachers scold and ill treat San children?

Answer: Teachers normally say to the San children 'we give you food you don't have at home, why do you not learn?' The reason why the teachers handle San kids that way is they say San children used to live in the bush, as soon as they do well in school they will be the same as the blacks. They are jealous of the kids, so they do not treat them well, thinking that the San kids will then go home.

Question: How do you respond when your children come home and tell you about these troubles they suffer at school in the hands of non-San teachers?

Answer: Sometimes when the kids come with such stories, the parents try to discuss such problems with the PTA and the VDC. However, the PTA and VDC often tell the parents 'you people are mad, just like your kids'. Consequently, the children end up just staying at home and not returning to school, even when we tell them that if they endure the hardship they might end up being teachers or occupying some position which would give them income and respect.

Question: Who are the people in the PTA and VDC?

Answer: The Herero and the Bayei, there are no San in these committees.

Question: What has been the result of the ill treatment of San children?

Answer: Many of the San children have absconded from school and eventually dropped out. When I lived in Xangwa, I always took children back to school when they absconded. Now I am a TB patient, I do not have the strength to do that anymore. I can cite one incidence which took place recently. There were some children from Dobe who were taken to school. When the children were first taken to school from Dobe, they travelled by car. Then, that same night, they left the school around midnight and ran all along the 20 km distance, arriving back in Dobe just before sunrise. All those children have dropped out and are now scattered all over. We really feel powerless.

Question: Was there no follow up by yourselves as the parents of pupils?

Answer: Yes, there was follow up. We went to the matron to discuss the problem with her. She advised us to keep the children at home. The matron says we should take away from school children who are inclined to abscond because they might be hurt on their way from school, something for which she would be blamed. She wants to protect herself that way.

Question: Are there any other issues that are pertinent to the provision of formal education to your children?

Answer: Yes, the issue of the language of instruction seems very important to us, as is that of the syllabus. Our children are forced to learn in Setswana, which is just another foreign language. Children are not allowed to speak in their mother tongue in class or within the school premises. Only English and Setswana are allowed. Also, we the San find it very important that traditional San knowledge be taught to our children at school. They have to know how we lived. We want to teach them the right kinds of veld foods, and also how to break the *mongongo* nut in a proper way. The boys need to know how to track and shoot animals and how to make crafts and build houses. They must also be taught how to tan leather and make traditional clothes.

The interview above has highlighted some of the salient problems faced by San children at school. An interview conducted at Xangwa virtually corroborated the situation in Dobe. At Xangwa, parents of San children complained that their children were taught by non-San teachers who did not know any of the San languages. San parents reported that their children suffered a lot of discouragement from the non-San structures in their efforts to acquire formal education. The school going RAD children in Xangwa include the Ovaherero, the Wayei and the San. The highest drop out rate is among the San children. This is really unfortunate, given that non-San teachers admit that San children are generally more intelligent than other children in RAD settlements (Reynolds, 1999). This high rate of intelligence is acknowledged despite the fact that other RAD children, the Bayei and the Ovaherero, know both their own mother tongues as well as the languages of the San among whom they live. Actually, the situation at Xangwa was that Wayei and Ovaherero children often translated for the San children, when a teacher used Setswana language as a medium of instruction. San children usually cope very well with Setswana language within a year.

In Xangwa, non-San teachers were more sympathetic to the plight of the San children than were the non-San teachers in Dobe. They encouraged San pupils to do their traditional dancing at school. The non-San teachers in Xangwa viewed all pupils at school as belonging to what should be seen as a big family. Unfortunately, in spite of their sympathy for the San children, the non-San teachers in Xangwa failed to recognise the validity of San cultures, beyond merely encouraging the children to do their dances. For example, the big family image of the non-San teachers was to be one in which the San children would be invited into Tswana culture, in other words, it was to be a form of assimilation. Actually, this is the view that the Botswana Government takes with regard to addressing the San problem in general, in spite of Government's stated position that 'the curriculum will be made flexible enough to take into account cultural and linguistic diversities of the different ethnic groups and teacher training will sensitise teachers to cultural differences' (Botswana Government, 1994:78). In spite of all that, the Government's overall approach is to integrate the San into mainstream Tswana society.

In contrast, UNICEF, one of the major NGOs that have addressed the educational aspect of the San problem, is taking a different approach. UNICEF is currently working on a curriculum that will allow San children to learn in their mother tongues without compromising the quality of the primary school teaching (UNICEF, 1999). The curriculum is to go further than the language question and address the entire culture issue, since formal school learning must take place within the learn-

er's cultural framework if it is to be effective. In Xangwa it has been observed that San children do not like to mix with their non-San colleagues socially. They are said to like to keep to themselves. In view of that, the UNICEF approach might well turn out to be the most effective so far, in terms of creating a conducive atmosphere for the formal schooling of the San children.

A certain change is taking place in the direction of elitism among the San children who are receiving formal education. In Xangwa, the San children who lived in the hostels were losing interest in their traditional food, such as the veld products, and were instead developing interest in modern dishes. Furthermore, even though San children did not associate with the 'black' children at school, when such children return to their homes during holidays, they interact more with non-San Batswana children than with their fellow San. Acquisition of a formal education seems to be causing social differentiation among San. It remains to be seen, however, whether this alienation will constitute the first step towards the elevation of social status for the recipients of education.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been concerned with identifying and discussing the otherwise hidden phenomenon of perceptions. Proceeding from an explanation of what perceptions are and how they are linked to attitudes, the paper has emphasised the need to realise that the perceptions that really matter in the emancipation of the San are not merely those of the San themselves. Rather, the paper has argued that in view of the power relations that form the bedrock on which the San disadvantage hinges, it is expedient to focus at length on the perceptions of the dominant non-San Batswana, the so called 'blacks', since it is they that to a large extent determine the fate of the welfare of the San in Botswana.

The paper has recognised that the mainstream Batswana dominate the San and deal with them injudiciously and with impunity at the three levels of the individual, the community and the state. After substantiating this claim, the chapter has focused on formal education.

Good has posited that the San were dispossessed of their land, cattle and labour power and skills by the rising Tswana elite (Good *op cit*). At the time in question and for the generation concerned, land, cattle and labour constituted the crucial factors of production and self determination. In the present era, acquisition of formal education has become a paramount source of livelihood. In this present paper, I have attempted to demonstrate how the same process, this time not of dispossession but of deprivation, is being extended into the critical arena of formal education in a bid to maintain the status quo in terms of the social relationships between the San and the 'blacks'. Once again, the dominant non-San 'blacks' are perpetuating the subjugation of the San by significantly reducing their chances of receiving formal education, currently the most crucial tool in connecting any people to economic opportunities. This is very serious, given that San have the lowest literacy rates in Botswana. Formal schooling is being made intolerable for the San children by the 'blacks' who completely dominate them. The drop out rate for San children remains high. Over three decades since Botswana's Independence, formal schooling has not placed any San in a position of influence. The San remain stigmatised, despised and without power. They continuously suffer the worst form of human rights abuse. Because they are dehumanised, they continue to be as vulnerable as ever to abuse by the 'blacks'. To all intents and purposes, their perception that they may not achieve much self-determination and recognition through their own efforts, unless they receive external assistance, appears completely valid.

It would appear that the greatest mistake Government has made is to pursue a non ethnic ap-

proach to the development of the remote area dwellers. The Government might have been correct in avoiding an approach that showed some resemblance to the policy of apartheid practised by the former South African regime. However, the San in Botswana have come to realise that being grouped together with ethnically different RADs has not assisted their cause at all. The other RADs do not share the stigma, nor do they share the San culture which is responsible for the stigma, and the perception the 'blacks' have of the San. More importantly for the San, life means total assimilation into a completely different culture, the culture of the 'blacks', while that is not by any means the case for other RADs. As the CBNRM programme has indicated for Zutshwa, other RADs not only subordinate the San, but also exclude them from development programmes and projects which were meant for all RADs in a community.

The way forward will be for the Botswana Government to realise the significance of differences among the RADs, even though they may live in the same communities. It is now clear that the empowerment of the San requires a different approach from that of other non-San RADs within the same community. This means that the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) needs to refocus, taking cognisance of the special circumstances of the San *vis-à-vis* other RADs. However, over and above everything else, a change in attitude needs to be initiated first among the 'blacks'. Only when the attitude of the 'blacks' towards the San is not as negative as it currently is, will the perception of the 'blacks' improve accordingly.

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NOTES

- ¹ 'Blacks' is what the San call the mainstream Batswana.
- ² Being a remote area dweller has its own perception problem, apart from the ethnicity question of the San. Remote areas are very undeveloped. They lack basic facilities and as a result, public officers are very reluctant to work in those areas. The public officers who seem comfortable in the remote areas are the unskilled, or those generally rendered failures elsewhere. In other words, remote areas get even worse manpower resources for their development programmes. Consequently, the turn over of public servants is high in the remote areas. This means that whatever small developments these places might have are never forthcoming due to high staff turnover. Overall, this situation enhances the stigma of the residents of the remote areas, and increases the negativity against the San in particular.
- ³ Rivers correctly reports that all RAD settlements in Ghanzi District now have a headman (in one case, the head of a settlement is a female). An important feature of the recently elected headmen is their ineffectiveness, when compared with 'black' headmen within the villages that are dominated by the non-San Batswana. San headmen are expected to either toe the line or face removal from office. The San acknowledge that the election of local leaders has not brought about any changes for them. It could be for this reason that, in two instances, the San chose a 'black' to head their settlement, deliberately avoiding one of their own.
- ⁴ Elaborating this point, Good puts the blame for the hard circumstances of the San entirely on the Botswana Government. He notes 'necessary improvements (of the lives of the San) depended on the political and administrative will of Government and Councils and this had been distinctly lacking'.
- ⁵ Actually, the RAD children were left out of this 'equitable' approach. This fact emerges further along in the same interview.
- ⁶ It is unfortunate that figures are not available to show the magnitude of the problems being discussed.