

A San Position: Research, the San and San Organisations

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Working Group of Indigenous Minorities of southern Africa

Kuru Development Trust

First People of the Kalahari

!Xu and Khwe Trust

Maiteko Tshwaragano Development Trust

Nyae Nyae Farmers Co-operative

West Caprivi Development Trust

Hai/om Development Trust

Omatako Valley Rest Camp Committee

Sonneblom/Donkerbos Committee

D'kat Village Organisation

West Hanahai Village Organisation

Statement

The San are amongst the most studied and researched indigenous people in the world. The world is growing and developing. However, it is very surprising to see that the socio-economic position and dignity of the San is declining in spite of all this research.

Various governments have in the past ignored the traditional norms, values and leadership structures of the different San people as well as different initiatives of San and their organisations in terms of organising themselves. Academics, on the other hand, have often ignored present socio-economic realities, cultural transition processes and dilemmas facing the San. They have frequently treated us as objects of research. They have rarely involved our people in setting their research agendas and thereby ignored our needs and desires.

Often such research has concentrated on few fundamental human needs and in most cases sought to get a better understanding of the San with very little benefit to the San themselves. Such research is associated with certain names and categories like "the Bushman" and "nomadic hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari". These names have created a stereotyped view of the San in the outside world.

The stereotypes of nomadism have been used to justify the exclusion of the San from their rights to land, natural resources and even development. The following are some examples which demonstrate how the San are disempowered by such stereotyping:

1. Government officials and landboards in Botswana will not allocate land to the San because they are nomadic.
2. Farmers in Namibia will not employ San to become foremen in their farms because they are nomadic.
3. Nurses throughout the subcontinent claim that the health situation of the San does not improve because they are nomadic and hence do not complete prescribed medication.
4. Governments will not build schools, clinics and provide other services to the San because they are nomadic.

The San are often overwhelmed by the sudden influx of researchers who come with different interests. In most cases there is minimal consultation with the subjects of study. It is usually just a shower of questions to the San with very little initiatives for exploring practical issues and no room involving the San in the planning for such research.

There is a growing awareness amongst the San people that it is time that the world should start to think about a more action-oriented type of research whereby there should be respect for the different San groups in terms of their culture and tradition as well as systems of authority and a joint search for preserving our culture and dignity whilst we are also making the inevitable transition to a modern society. Such research would be conducted in such a way that the organisations that are working at the grassroots level with the different San groups are given recognition, support, respect, and the opportunity to participate. This type of research would be of benefit to all parties concerned.

Such applied research would develop research ideas within San communities and development programmes would aim not only at trying to know the San better but also at trying to uplift their standards of living. Such research would focus on real and concrete problems that the San face in modern times. The researchers and

others should encourage their San translators or co-researchers to complete their schooling so that they are able to become part of a student's exchange programme.

The San acknowledge the value of research just as they acknowledge the dignity and respect of themselves as San and the role that San organisations have in facilitating the process of their taking control of their lives. The San regard themselves as the experts concerning San issues and should thus be involved in research from the planning stage. Any research proposal should be submitted to their organisations for consideration. If academics will continue with research in the way we are suggesting, the San people present in this gathering feel that a more valid contribution will be made to the journey of our people.

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