

Hunters and Herding: Local Level Livestock Development among Kalahari San

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The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic upsurge in activities involving grassroots socioeconomic development among Kalahari San. More and more San communities are electing rural development committees and initiating small-scale projects which promise to improve their livelihood. An increasing call is being heard for economic self-determination, particularly in decision making for development strategies, and it is clear that without local participation, chances are slim that development efforts will be successful.



San with small livestock herd.

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The Republic of Botswana in southern Africa is one of the few countries in the Third World with substantial foreign exchange reserves, in part due to the exploitation of minerals and grazing, two resources which the Kalahari Desert has in abundance. Cattle are crucial to the rural economy, and they serve as the major focus of investment. The livestock industry is the most important source of employment for the people of the Kalahari, offering an estimated 25,000 available jobs.

The San are crucial to the Kalahari livestock industry. Many work as herders (*badisa*) on cattle posts and ranches, and a number of San keep livestock of their own (Lee 1979:364ff.; Hitchcock 1978, 1982). Numbering between 40,000 and 60,000, the San (Basarwa, Bushmen) are usually described as hunter-gatherers or non-stockholders, yet there is mounting archaeological, ethnohistoric, and ethnographic evidence to suggest that the San have had access to livestock and livestock products for a substantial period of time. Archaeological surveys and excava-

tions in the Kalahari reveal that agropastoralists have resided in the region for over 1,500 years (Denbow 1984). In the nineteenth century San were used as herders by Tswana, Kalanga and other Bantu-speaking populations, some of whom bartered cattle in exchange for services in a system known as *sejara*. Other San obtained livestock through wages earned in formal sector employment such as the mines of South Africa. It is interesting to note that according to oral history data, cattleless populations sometimes obtained livestock from San who had managed to build up fairly sizeable breeding herds.

It is sometimes said that cattle are kept for social or prestige purposes in Botswana, and that as a result people are unwilling to sell them. Therefore, a major focus of development effort in the livestock sector in Botswana has been to commercialize the industry. The second major emphasis in livestock development has been to increase production. This has been attempted through the expansion of animal health programs regarding breeding and herd management.

By and large, these programs have bypassed the San, many of whom live in remote areas and tend to have small numbers of domestic animals. Complaints have been often heard that San cattle were not vaccinated by veterinary officers or that marketing in rural areas was difficult. Access to the international beef market which pays high producer prices through the Botswana Meat Commission was not possible, according to many San, because they were unable to fill quotas. Even if they did, they noted, their stock was usually condemned once it reached the slaughterhouse.

Large-scale, capital-intensive livestock development projects have generally been unsuccessful in Africa. This is true in Botswana, where a number of projects funded by multilateral banks and donor agencies have failed to meet their objectives of raising incomes and production. In fact, in some cases these projects have led to dispossession, reduced employment opportunities, and lowered nutritional status for resident groups, some of whom have been San. The implementation difficulties these projects have faced have led to calls for new directions in livestock development in Botswana (Hitchcock 1978, 1982b).

In 1975, the Government of Botswana initiated a land reform and livestock development program which was designed to raise production levels, reduce

income disparities and prevent further range deterioration (Republic of Botswana 1975). As surveys proceeded, it became clear that many small-scale livestock owners and non-stockholders would be affected by the changes in land tenure. Since foraging areas would be giving way to ranches in some areas, administrators, anthropologists and, significantly, resident groups themselves, suggested that development efforts involving land, water and livestock be started. It was noted that livestock not only represent a major source of subsistence and income, but are crucial to crop production. Under what is known as the Hypothecation Act, cattle can be pledged as collateral for loans. In some cases, headmen and Land Boards will only grant rights to water points to those people who have sufficiently large herds to warrant being given additional grazing. In this way, livestock possession can lead to a water right, which, in turn, provides access to land.

As human and livestock populations expand in the Kalahari, opportunities for hunting and gathering are reduced. Cattle eat some of the same plants as people, and as a result people in heavily stocked areas have to seek alternative sources of subsistence to gathering wild foods. Most San engage in a variety of activities in order to make a living. It is not uncommon to hear the statement, "We want to have cattle and crops, so



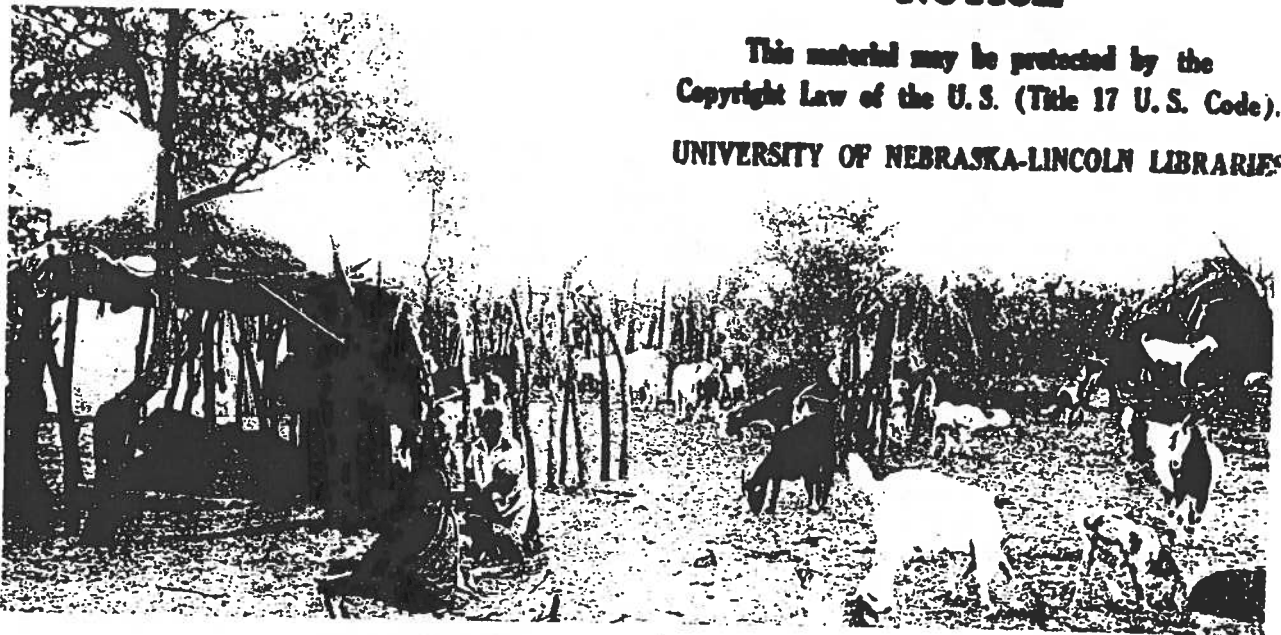
San hunter with porcupine.

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San village with livestock.

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we can live like other people." Cattle are seen by many as the best means of achieving self-sufficiency. In addition, cattle are recognized as having significant social value. Among the Tyua of the Nata River region, for example, cattle are being requested for brideprice payments. Traditional healers, too, are requiring provision of a cow or goat for their services.

Kalahari San and other groups face a number of constraints in livestock production, perhaps the most significant of which is the lack of permanent water in many parts of the Kalahari. A few San have access to wells, but none possess sufficient capital to drill boreholes. Another constraint is that much of the available land is deficient in nutrients. Lack of phosphate, for example, prevents cattle from walking easily. While this problem can be surmounted through the provision of bonemeal, salts and Rumevite, these inputs are expensive and often unavailable in remote areas. A third constraint in the Kalahari is the presence of predators, notably lions and hyenas. Some San have had virtually their entire herd decimated in a single night by a pride of lions. When they have taken steps to rid the area of predators, they have sometimes been jailed for hunting without a license.

There are also social constraints faced by San herders. In the nineteenth century, San and other servile peoples were not allowed to own livestock and other means of production. In the 1870s or 1880s, Khama III of the Bamangwato, the largest of the Tswana tribes, decreed that serfs (*bolata*, *botlhanka*) should be given an animal for their work. In the early twentieth century, when San were found in possession of cattle, other groups seized the animals on the pretext that they had been stolen. Now, a legal constraint to livestock ownership exists on game reserves, where statutes prohibit people from taking domestic animals into parks and other state-owned land. In spite of the constraints, a significant number of San have been able to obtain stock and have become relatively successful herd managers in their own right.

Livestock Development

Livestock loan schemes designed to increase subsistence security and promote household income have been initiated in Botswana. Livestock loan programs have been put into practice in remote parts of Ghanzi and Northwest districts, and have been suggested for implementation in Communal Service Centers near commercial ranches in Southern and Central Districts.

The scheme works as follows: Available livestock are controlled by the District Council and one or two heifers are given to a household. In Ghanzi District the qualifications for getting a heifer were based upon whether or not a person possessed management capability, place of residence and ownership of a field. In Northwest District, the person(s) participating in the scheme had to be a member of the particular well-site group. In some cases, employment history is also taken into consideration. The heifer is given to the household which then has the responsibility of looking after it. Repayment of the loan is the return of the second progeny of the cow. In order to make the scheme successful, the recipients of the loan animals have to be given the opportunity to get extension advice on animal husbandry and livestock management.

Small-scale livestock production has been undertaken in rural communities in the Kalahari, and with the exception of !Xade in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, cattle are found in all seven San settlements. However, only a small proportion of the livestock was obtained through the government loan scheme, the majority having been acquired through purchase, exchange or as payment for services rendered. Cattle are managed on an individual rather than a collective basis, but arrangements are sometimes made by a group for procuring a bull or artificial insemination.

Livestock development projects for smallholders must be flexible in their approach and must be geared toward the needs of the target population. While some anthropologists and administrators recommended the establishment of a commercial ranch-type

operation which would be managed by San, it is clear that this strategy would have limited impacts and benefit only a small number of people.

Initial capital costs of a ranching scheme are fairly high, but if local contributions were obtained, many of these expenses could be defrayed. One argument against providing free gifts of livestock and land to San is that this strategy serves to undermine their socioeconomic systems and promote dependency. Others feel that the San have been in a disadvantageous position and that they encounter special problems when trying to acquire livestock. In their opinion, livestock should be granted to San individuals, families or communities that demonstrate a specific desire and need for them. Money for running livestock development schemes can be obtained from a community fund, as was done in the case of the ka/Gae community in Ghanzi District. This fund can also serve as a backup for individuals who are hard-hit by heavy livestock losses due to disease or drought.

Some of the drawbacks to livestock possession among San include the possible conflicts when some people have domestic animals while others have none. Social pressure is often brought to bear on livestock owners to share their wealth, usually by killing their animals and dividing up the meat. Those individuals who refuse to kill their animals are seen as hard-hearted and stingy, and are sometimes shunned by kinsmen and friends. Other problems include the destruction cattle cause to other people's fields. Crop damage by livestock is a problem often brought to the local *kgotla* (council place). Overgrazing in the vicinity of settlements is becoming a serious problem in many areas, notably at !Xade; and in some of the more heavily overgrazed areas, people depend on food relief from the government.

San have had problems maintaining access to land in many parts of the Kalahari. In West Hanahai, for example, a large herd owner moved his cattle against the will of the community and proceeded to utilize water and grazing land. Pressure from the Remote Area Development Officer, backed up by the Ghanzi District Council, eventually forced the man to remove his herd. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated instance. San land rights have often been questioned as Land Boards and government ministries have sometimes failed to recognize foraging and small-scale agropastoralism as a legitimate form of land use (Hitchcock 1978; Lee 1985; Wilmsen 1985).

On the other hand, if a remote area dweller were able to build up a herd of cattle or smallstock (sheep and goats), it would provide means of increasing production, obtaining adequate subsistence and reducing dependency on other people. At the same time, it would provide additional evidence that San have land needs that go beyond foraging. While cattle, according to Gordon (1984:27), are seen as sources of subsistence and not as capital investments in the cash economy, this is not necessarily true for Botswana San populations, many of whom have expressed the desire to become large-scale operators. They are all too aware that it is the larger cattle owners who are gaining access to large areas of grazing in the Kalahari.

Some Botswana San might look at a development effort going on in Eastern Bushmanland in Namibia for an illustration of how local level livestock promotion can be carried out. As Marshall and Ritchie (1984:123ff.) have described, a project emphasizing a mixed economic strategy of foraging, gardening and pastoralism can be very useful in promoting self-reliance. Already, a total of 10 communities with an average of 25 to 30 people and 30 cattle each have been started on the initiative of Zu/Wasi themselves, and a Zu/Wasi Farmers Union was founded in 1986. A major reason for expanding this initiative, and others like it, is that it will help give the San occupancy rights to the land on which they have resided for generations. Since land is the key to survival for San as well as other indigenous peoples, it is apparent that local level livestock development projects are one means of ensuring the future well-being of a people who have been portrayed, to their detriment, as some of the last hunter-gatherers on earth. □

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