

Game Park vs. the San:

Conservation and Sustainable Development in Kalahari

by Robert K. Hitchcock

As the pace of development in the Kalahari Desert region of Botswana in southern Africa has increased, questions have been raised about the future of the indigenous populations residing there. Concerns have been voiced about the status of people living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR).

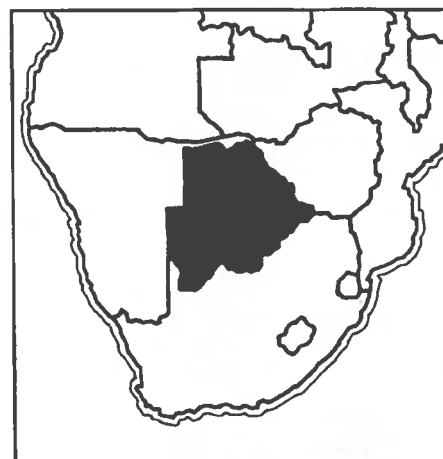
The Republic of Botswana is one of the few countries left in the world that has a fairly sizeable number of people who derive a significant portion of their subsistence from hunting and gathering. Most of the anthropological research on foraging populations has concentrated on *San* (*Basarwa*, *Bushmen*), but it is important to note that these people are not the only ones who live in remote areas and who exploit wild foods. In the Central Kalahari region, for example, there are *Bakgalagadi* groups who spend part of their time foraging.

The Botswana government has identified those people in rural areas who live outside established villages as a major target group for development assistance. Calling them Remote Area Dwellers (RADs), the government has been providing technical and other kinds of assistance to these populations for the past decade and a half. A wide range of projects were carried out, including water development, education and agriculture.

There are several reasons for the expansion of interest in the situations remote area populations were dealing with in Botswana. First of all, the initiation of a large-scale development and land reform program, the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP), resulted in the discovery that there were large numbers of people in rural areas, many of whom did not own livestock and tended to be poverty-stricken. Secondly, the drought of the early 1980s (1981-1986) caused a certain amount of nutritional and social stress for a fairly sizeable

number of people in rural Botswana. The drought relief programs mounted by the government proved to be effective at preventing starvation. At the same time, a portion of the remote area population became more dependent on food relief and labour intensive public works projects.

In the past three decades a number of different recommendations were made concerning the future of the Kalahari. There were those planners who felt that some areas should be turned into commercial cattle ranches. Others felt that the Kalahari wildlife populations and their habitats needed to be conserved, so they pushed for large areas to be set aside as parks and reserves. Botswana has the largest percent of its total area set aside as parkland of all the countries in southern Africa (see Table 1). There were also planners who felt that a multiple-use strategy was useful in rural areas, so they advocated



BOTSWANA, South Africa

the establishment of small villages with associated arable and grazing areas.

One of the land categories that planners recommended be established in Botswana was Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). In these places, people would be allowed to continue their foraging but would also be able to carry out other kinds of activities, such as crop and livestock raising and small-scale rural industries.

One of the areas where rural development activities were promoted was !Xade in Central Kalahari Game Reserve. By the early 1980s, it had become clear that the people of !Xade were having a significant effect on their habitats. Major changes occurred in the subsistence and settlement systems of !Xade and other Central Kala

Table 1. Data on parks and reserves in Southern African countries

Name of the country	Number of parks	Parkland area (km ²)	Percent of parkland area
Angola	—	—	—
Botswana	7	47,273	7.874
Lesotho	1	65	0.214
Malawi	3	3,109	2.624
Mozambique	2	5,750	0.743
Namibia	—	—	—
South Africa	27	51,635	4.229
Swaziland	—	—	—
Tanzania	8	36,872	3.901
Zambia	17	58,988	7.838
Zimbabwe	17	28,454	7.285

hari populations, so much so that in 1985 the Botswana Government called for a commission of inquiry to assess the various options which might be pursued in the area. The CKGR Commission reviewed evidence, interviewed district officials, and held meeting with residents of the CKGR between September and November, 1985.

The CKGR Commission recommended that the portions of the reserve be degazetted and turned into a Wildlife Management Area where people would be allowed to continue to reside and utilize local resources. It was also recommended that "communal cells" be created in those areas where there were significant population concentrations. People would then be able to continue living and working in the CKGR.

These recommendations were rejected by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which oversees parks and reserves in Botswana. Instead, it was stipulated that the residents of the reserve would be encour-

aged to move to areas outside the boundaries of the CKGR where they would be provided with facilities. In a speech to Parliament on 1 December 1986, the Minister of Commerce and Industry stated that the government had a mandate to make decisions in the national interest. He also stated that the reserve would lose its integrity if people were allowed to remain living there (Botswana Daily News, December 2, 1986, p.1).

Discussions were held with reserve residents in an attempt to convince them of the efficacy of moving to new areas. Several reasons were given by government officials to CKGR residents as to why the resettlement was necessary. First of all, they noted that the move would help ensure conservation of the resource base in the reserve. Secondly, they argued that it would enhance the tourism potential of the region. A third reason given by government officials was that its moving to new areas would enable local populations to direct access to

development assistance.

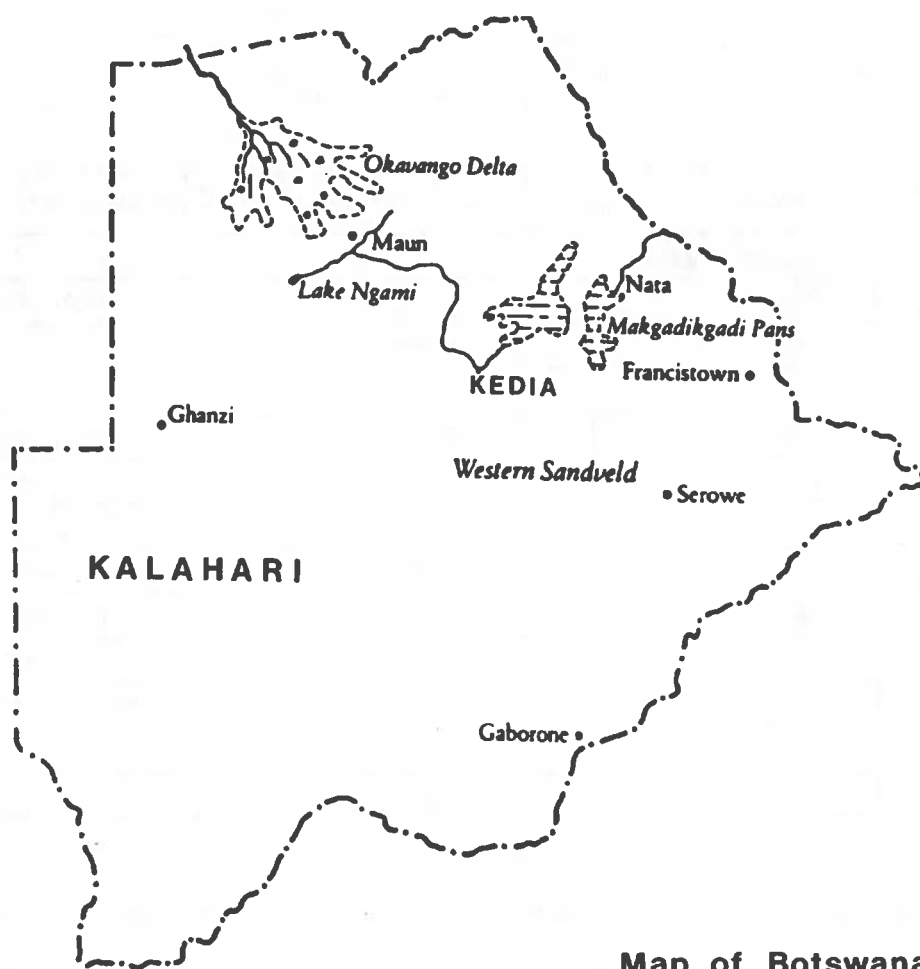
The decision to remove people from the reserve caused consternation among residents of the reserve, some of whom wanted to stay in the places they had lived in for generations. There were also questions raised by Members of Parliament in Botswana, who felt that the proposed resettlement was not in the best interests of the local people. Two Botswana government ministers visited various settlements in CKGR in May-June 1988, in order to consult with them about the government's decision. A common refrain at the meetings was that while people appreciated the government's development assistance, they wanted social services to be provided in their places of origin (Botswana Daily News, June 7, 1988).

The issue of the future of the people of the CKGR received international attention on articles in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and *Africa Report* in 1988. In September 1988, at the Fifth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies in Darwin, Australia, a motion was passed by the delegates which stated that the peoples of the Kalahari should not be required to move out of the reserve. In April, 1989, Survival International published an Urgent Action Bulletin (UAB/BOT/1) concerning the people being threatened with expulsion from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. In June, 1989 the President of Botswana met with members of conservation and development organizations in Washington D.C., in order to assure them of Botswana's good intentions concerning the environment and people of the Kalahari.

It is important to stress that although different kinds of policies have been pursued in the Central Kalahari, the government has yet to stop providing assistance to the people in the reserve. It also has yet to require anyone to move out of the region. Nevertheless, pressure to make the Central Kalahari Game Reserve a true game reserve, where people would not be allowed to reside or hunt and gather, continues unabated.

Change in the Central Kalahari

In 1986, the Botswana Government decided to introduce an Accelerated Remote Area Development Programme (ARADP). Donor assistance was sought, and the Norwegian Agency for Interna-



Map of Botswana

Table 2. Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in Botswana

Name	District	Size (km ²)
Nunga	Chobe	2,334
Mamama/Kanyu	Chobe	12,938
Tainafupa	Central	11,138
Ngamiland	North West	22,440
Western Sandfeld	Central	3,234
Groot Laagte	Ghanzi	3,853
East Ghanzi (Okwa)	Ghanzi	55,159
West Ghanzi	Ghanzi	11,616
Kgalagadi	Kgalagadi	34,481
Kweneng	Kweneng	6,075
Ngwaketse	Southern	2,672
		TOTAL 145,740

Note: Data for this table were obtained from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana.

tional Development (NORAD) agreed to provide financial and technical assistance. Some of the development activities were to be undertaken in Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), a list of which is presented in Table 2. Some of the WMAs are on the peripheries of the CKGR, which is the largest game reserve in Botswana and one of the largest protected areas on the African Continent. A suggestion made by some government planners is that the G/wi, G//ana, and Bakgalagadi residents of the CKGR should be moved into some of these WMAs (e.g. into Okwa and the one in the western sandveld region of Central District).

The CKGR was originally established on the recommendation of an anthropologist, George Silberbauer, in order to preserve the people, wildlife, and habitats of the central Kalahari region. The CKGR is a vast area of 52,347 km² comprised of undulating tree-bush savannas, fossil river valleys, and rolling grasslands dotted with shrubs. Just to the south of the CKGR is Khutse, a small (2,703 km²) reserve set up in 1971.

As a semi-arid region, the Central Kalahari poses particular problems for the human, faunal and floral population within it. Rainfall is relatively low, averaging around 300 millimetres per year, and it is highly variable both spatially and temporally. Wildlife populations tend to be fairly mo-

bile: wildebeest herds, for example, move over substantial areas in their quest for grazing. Human populations also tend to be somewhat mobile, and they cover large amounts of land. Table 3 presents data on group sizes, range sizes, and mobility of CKGR populations recorded by anthropologists and Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) personnel. It is evi-

dent that there is variation both in average group size and range size. Human groups survive in part through exploitation of a wide variety of fauna and flora and through adjusting group sizes and mobility in order to ensure sufficient resource availability.

There have been a number of changes over time in Central Kalahari, some of them due to environmental factors (e.g. drought) and others coming about because of human activities. Some of these changes include the construction of veterinary cordon fences, borehole drilling, establishment of cattle post and ranches on the reserve's peripheries, and the carrying out of mineral prospecting by mining companies. The status of the region as a game reserve under the **Fauna Conservation Proclamation** of 1961 has meant that hunting was not allowed in the region, except for those people who were dependent upon foraging for living. To a certain extent, hunting strategies have changed somewhat in the CKGR, particularly with the introduction of horses and steel traps. Analysis of the limited information on hunting with the aid of modern weapons suggest that most of the people who engage in gun hunting are from outside of the reserve. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks has attempted to control poaching in the reserve but has had limited success because of manpower constraints.

Demographic and socio-economic

Table 3. Group Size, Range Size, and Mobility of Central Kalahari Game Reserve Populations

Group Name(s)	Number of groups	Group Size(s) and Average	Range(s) and average	Number Annual Residential Moves
G/wi	6	21-85 57.17	457-1,036 779.67 km ²	6-15
G/wi	>2	up to 70, one was 120	300-400 mi ²	
G/wi, g//ana	9	7-57 22.89	4,000 km ²	11
G/wi, g//ana, Bakgalagadi	11	41-167 98.73	505-4,323 222.64 km ²	4-10
G/wi, g//ana	13	3-98 33.08	5,000 km ²	

changes have taken place in the reserve, as well. Overall, there has been a reduction in the number of people living in the reserve. Whereas there were as many as 5,000 people in the reserve area in the early 1960s, the number in 1985 was estimated to be approximately 1,200. It is important to stress, however, that the numbers of people utilizing the reserve expands and contracts, depending in part upon rainfall and resource availability. Information collected through interviews, evaluation of reports, and examination of official and published data indicate that as many as 3,500 people claim to have land rights in the reserve.

In the 1960s the people occupying the reserve tended to change their group sizes and residential location seasonally. Foraging populations aggregated near pans and in fossil river valleys during the wet season and dispersed into small band- or family-sized groups during the dry season. Groups moved as many as 15-20 times a year. The areas over which people foraged averaged between 450 and 4,000 km². By the mid-1980s substantial changes had occurred in group structure and settlement patterns. People in the reserve had aggregated into a relatively small number of settlements which they occupied either year-round or for most of the year. This trend was seen particularly in the !Xade area, where the numbers of people grew from 200 in the 1960s to over 1,000 in 1988. One of the impacts of this demographic growth process was an expansion in the amount of area utilized for food. Another impact was the degradation of the local environment in the !Xade area as a result of the larger numbers of people and domestic animals in the area.

The process of sedentarization among CKGR populations was accompanied by a whole series of other socioeconomic and environmental changes. The greater densities of people resulted in an increase in pressure upon local resources. Wild plant foods were utilized heavily in the vicinity of the settlements, and in some cases, such as at !Xade, people had to either change the kinds of resources they were utilizing, or expand the size of the area that they covered during the course of their food procurement trips. I was told that hunting groups at !Xade covered area which averaged well over 5,000 km², a figure similar to that obtained by anthropologist Masakazu Osaki in 1982-83 (M. Osaki, personal communication). The over-exploitation of resources in the vicinity of the settlements



San Woman, Botswana. Photo: Espen Wæhle.

resulted in an increase in nutritional stress among some of the residents of the CKGR, especially children. Data provided to the CKGR Fact Finding Mission in October, 1985 by the staff Nurse at !Xade Health Post showed that growth failure among children under five years of age was much greater at !Xade than it was at other settlements (Ngaire Reid, letter to CKGR Commission, 10 October, 1985). In order to counteract these problems, the Botswana Government initiated a drought relief feeding programme in the CKGR. It is also interesting to note that morbidity rates were higher among settled groups than they were among mobile ones in the CKGR.

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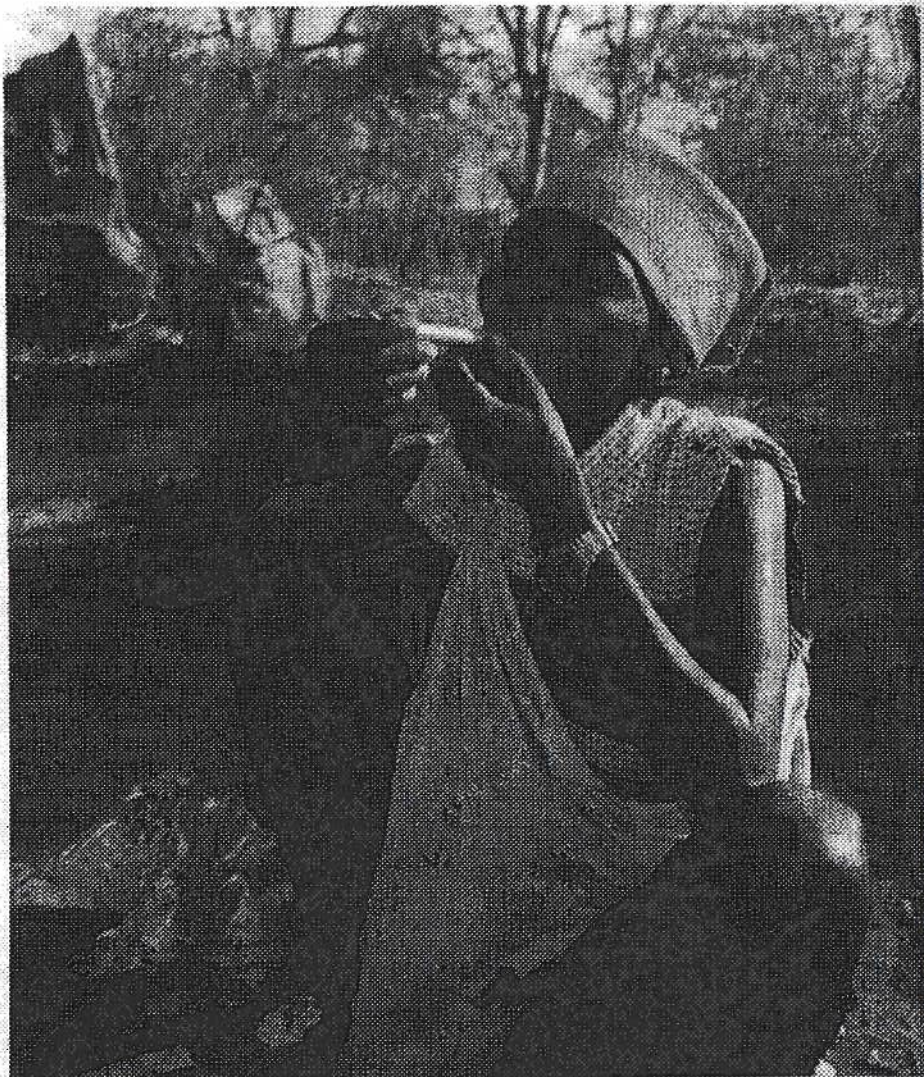
them moved to places to the east of the reserve, and some of them settled at the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) camp at the main entrance gate. In 1986, the government decided that a similar move should be made by the residents of the Central Kalahari. It is ironic that while greater emphasis is being placed on improving the socioeconomic status of rural populations, some RADs may lose their traditional lands and thus face potential economic difficulties. According to some reserve residents, this move could exacerbate the already existing problems of access to resource, and it might accentuate social conflicts.

By the 1980s, it was apparent that the socioeconomic status of some of the households in the CKGR and Khutse areas was declining. In some cases, this negative

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trend was due to drought which affected the population adversely. However, it is not only environmental factors which have had negative impact on the central Kalahari populations, but also political and economic changes. Hunting regulations have been enforced more strictly, and some group members have gone to prison for extended periods. Social conflicts and alcoholism have increased in some of the settlements in and adjacent to the CKGR and Khutse. People have had to diversify their economic activities in order to maintain themselves. Some of them have become destitute and have moved to villages in the surrounding districts where they receive small stipends from Community Development departments of local District Councils. A few people have been able to make a living through sales of handicraft or meat.

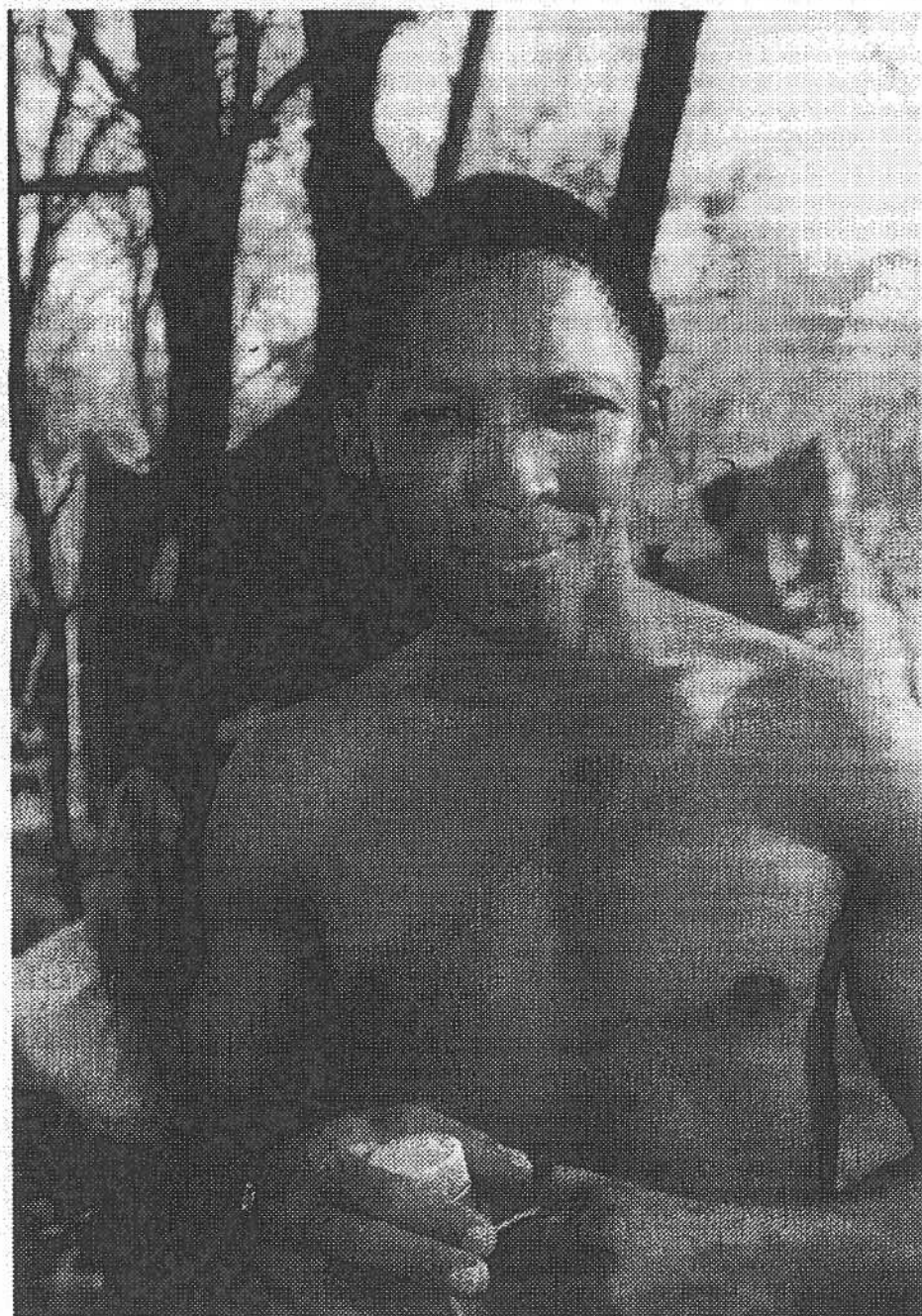
Some of the households in the reserve keep small stock (sheep and goats), donkeys, poultry, and dogs. It is important to note, however, that very few of these households can be described as being self-sufficient pastoralists. The majority of the people in the Central Kalahari pursue a mixed economy strategy, with foraging being supplemented by food production, wage labour, rural industries, and Botswana government drought relief assistance. Those individuals or groups who could not sustain themselves in the reserve this way have often ended up moving out of the area to seek employment at farms or ranches.

The Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) has provided development assistance to the people of !Xade and, to a lesser extent, other areas in the reserve, since the mid-1970s. A borehole, school, health post, staff housing, and other facilities have been established at !Xade under the auspices of the RADP and the Ghanzi District Council. Community service scheme (Tirelo Sechaba) participants have been posted to !Xade as have a number of extension workers (e.g. Remote Area Development Assistants, health workers). Non-formal education activities have been initiated, and the kgotla committee there is relatively active. During the drought period of the 1980s, food has been distributed at !Xade and other settlements in the reserve, and labour intensive development projects have been carried out (e.g. construction of a road between Ghanzi and !Xade). Both the Central and Kweneng District Councils have been involved in

providing water and other types of assistance to settlements in the eastern and southern parts of the CKGR.

One of the major arguments used in justifying the removal of local population was that such a strategy would facilitate tourism in the region. According to government figures, there were some 181 tourists in 1986 and 300 in 1987. Many of these tourists went to Kalahari expressly to "see Bushmen", as they put it to tour operators and others who spoke to them. Tour operators felt that it was to their advantage

to have local people in these areas since it would serve to attract clients. While some San and Bakgalagadi noted their reluctance to perform dances for tourists and especially removing their western clothing for photographs, the majority of the CKGR and Khutse area residents acknowledged that they liked the income generated by tourism. Some of the villages in the reserve such as !Xade and Meno-athe have received substantial amounts of money from sales of goods to tourists over the years, and the people therefore are



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somewhat reluctant to forego the opportunity to deal with visitors from outside the region.

It has been suggested that an underlying reason for the decision to remove people from the reserve was to respond to the interests of environmentalists who were pressuring the European Economic Community to withdraw financial support for Botswana unless greater efforts were made to conserve wildlife and other natural resources. A second suggestion is that some individuals in Botswana feel it important to "villagize" the RADs and thus bring them into the mainstream of life in the country. A third reason given by government officials was that the move out of the reserve would enable people to be assisted more easily, and thus it would help further development goals. Admittedly, there are also those who feel that DeBeers and other mining companies want complete access to the reserve for mineral exploitation purposes. Finally, a few people have suggested that livestock owners would like to see large portions of reserve de-gazetted so that they could turn into communal lands.

Clearly, the decision to remove people from their ancestral lands could serve to erode the social, economic and political status of RADs. Efforts will have to be made to ensure that adequate amounts of land are provided for those who are removed. Special attention will have to be paid to the allocation procedures of Land Boards. At present the Land Boards give only group allocation to RADs, whereas individual allocations are made to other people. District Councils will also have to see to it that economic assistance is provided to people who are relocated so that they are able to sustain themselves in their new areas.

One of Botswana's four main planning objectives is to promote social justice. The main reason for improving the economy of the country is to provide the basis for improved living standards. While resettlement policies have not always had negative social and economic consequences, it is difficult to implement them equitably. In the case of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, it is possible that people will indeed be relocated to new areas. The question is whether or not those areas will contain sufficient resources to support the additional people. It is also open to speculation whether the relocated people will have security of tenure over their new

lands. It is clear that if Botswana is to achieve its goals of self-reliance and unity, careful thought will have to be given to the ways in which the CKGR resettlement issue is handled.

Recent developments

In the late 1980s pressure to make the Central Kalahari Game Reserve a true game reserve or national park, where people would not be allowed to reside or to hunt and gather, subsided but did not disappear completely. Some of the people in the Central Kalahari began to form their own grassroots organisations in an effort to promote self-help and development activities. Others became increasingly active politically. In October, 1989 a local San man from !Xade in the CKGR was elected as a District Councillor for Ghanzi, the district which oversees affairs in the CKGR. While this individual has not had much success at changing government policy, his very presence on the district council may make it possible for positive steps to be taken in the future.

The formation of grassroots development organisations among San and other rural people may come none too soon. Pressure for turning land designated as reserved into grazing land is building. Plans have been made for a Trans Kalahari Highway to the south of the reserve which will have both social and environmental impacts. There has also been talk of a Trans Kalahari Railway which would cut across the CKGR. And mining companies continue to have an interest in the region.

There have been on-going problems of nutritional stress affecting at least some of the more vulnerable members of the population of the Central Kalahari. Health and nutritional surveys conducted in the Central Kalahari in the late 1980s revealed malnutrition among some of the San children and pregnant and lactating women. In June, 1990, the government decided to stop the drought relief feeding program in rural Botswana, but continuing nutritional difficulties led to the re-establishment of the food provision in late 1990.

In November, 1990, Botswana government planners suggested that the CKGR be nominated as a biosphere reserve, a category of specially protected areas designated originally by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) under its Man and

the Biosphere (MAB) Program. Under the biosphere reserve program, people would be allowed to continue residing in the region, and they would have the opportunity to utilise local natural resources as long as they did it in a sustainable manner.

The question remains as to whether or not San will be allowed the right to manage their own resources and plot their own development strategies in the Central Kalahari. While the government of Botswana has committed itself officially to allowing local people to utilise wild resources, there are still restrictions on the numbers and types of plants and animals to be exploited. A new natural resource management project sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks in Botswana is designed to assist rural people in increasing their incomes from local resources, but decisions have yet to be made as to the kinds of utilization programs to be initiated.

It is important to stress that although different kinds of policies have been pursued in the Central Kalahari, the Botswana government has not required anyone to move out of the region. It also has yet to stop providing food to the people in the reserve. The people in the Central Kalahari say that they are very glad for the help, but what they really want is opportunities to increase their income and jobs. As they put it, if the people of the Central Kalahari are to have the same rights as other citizens of the country, they ought to be allowed to benefit from development initiatives. □