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Resource Rights and Resettlement Among the San of Botswana

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Photo: Robert K. Hitchcock



Kua hunter-gathers in the east-central Kalahari.

In March, 1996, Roy Sesana, a G//ana headman from Molapo in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve of Botswana, and John Hardbattle, a Nharo from Buitsavango in the Ghanzi Farms region, spoke before the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. As representatives of an indigenous San non-government organization (NGO), Kgeikani Kweni (First People of the Kalahari), they stressed that the San, the indigenous peoples of southern Africa, were facing some major human rights problems, including forced resettlement out of their traditional areas and legislation which restricted their rights to hunt and gather. These situations, they argued, resulted in San losing their land, resources, and cultural identity.

San in Botswana have been required to move out of areas that they had occupied, in some cases, for hundreds of years. The resettlement process has had significant effects on their well-being, it reduces their access to natural resources with which they are familiar, restricts the amount of land they have to reside in and use, and puts them in positions where they are impinging on other groups, a process which has sometimes led to social conflicts.

In 1997, the government of Botswana chose to resettle several hundred residents outside of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), the second largest game reserve in Africa. The justification for this involuntary resettlement was that it would promote conservation and development and

would improve the standards of living of the San. The Central Kalahari case provides an excellent example of how international, national, and local pressures have affected the well-being of local people in Africa and how recommendations from environmental organizations and development agencies have influenced policies at the state level.

Botswana's Land Management Policies

An argument made by Hardbattle and Sesana was that San had been removed from areas in the past to establish freehold farms. Beginning in the early 1970s, the World Bank funded projects which resulted in the resettlement and loss of resource access rights of sizable numbers of San, especially in the western sandveld regions of the country. People originally residing in these commercial ranches were required to relocate and relatively little compensation was provided to the households that were resettled. The government of Botswana dealt with the land rights of the people removed from the commercial ranches by establishing so-called 'communal service centers.' But these areas were generally small in size and did not contain sufficient resources to sustain the populations residing there either as hunter-gatherers or as mixed forager-agropastoralists.

Later, it was found that there was little land that could be set aside as reserves, so an alternative land category was created: Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). These areas are

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Dispossession in Africa

portions of the country in which natural resource use, both consumptive and non-consumptive (e.g. game viewing), is to be the primary economic activity. By 1992, some 66,750 square kilometers were gazetted legally as WMAs under the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act. Other land was designated as state land, including national parks and game reserves. The largest of these conserved areas was the CKGR, which was established in 1961 with the help of anthropologist George Silberbauer in order to accommodate the needs of several thousand G/wi, G//ana, and Bakgalagadi, people who had lived in the region for generations.

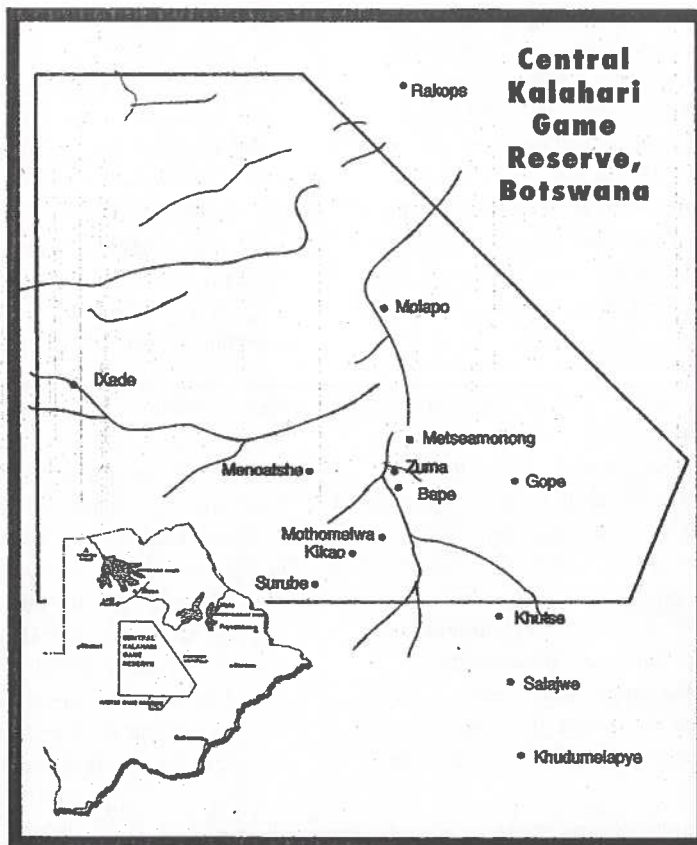
In the 1960s, people in the reserve were primarily hunter-gatherers who depended on a wide range of plant and animal species. Mobility was relatively high, with annual camp moves occurring as often as 10-15 times per year. Group sizes were small, averaging between 25 and 80, and they consisted of people related primarily through kinship, marriage, long-standing friendship, and socio-economic ties. In the 1960s, the people of the Central Kalahari tended to range over large areas which averaged between 900 and 4,000 square kilometers. Over time, there has been a general reduction in range sizes to the point where they averaged less than 450 square kilometers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Specific groups had long-standing customary rights to specific territories which they passed from one generation to the next. People were able to obtain rights to territories on the basis of birth, marital (affinal) ties, and by asking the area's traditional occupants. There were also cases where people established customary land rights through colonization, that is, moving into areas that were either uninhabited or which had experienced population reductions due to drought, disease, or out-migration for employment.

There have been significant changes over time in the economic systems of resident populations in the CKGR. Whereas the people of the region were mobile foragers in the 1960s, in the 1990s, the vast majority of the people living in the reserve depended on domestic foods obtained through drought relief, national feeding programs, or by

purchasing it. Some residents kept goats, dogs, donkeys, and horses, but—it should be noted—no cattle. Horses and dogs were sometimes used in subsistence hunting activities and nearly all of the hunting in the reserve was done with traditional weapons, including spears, bows and poisoned arrows, clubs, and snares. After 1979, local hunters were allowed to obtain a specified number of wild animals legally as long as they had in their possession a Special Game License (SGL), a license that was, in effect, a subsistence

hunter's license. Some environmental researchers argued vociferously that local people should not be allowed to hunt at all in the reserve. They sought the assistance of the European Union to put pressure on Botswana to remove the people from the CKGR and to declare the area as a game reserve along the lines of those outlined by the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Between 1986 and the present, various pressures on people inside the reserve encouraged them to move outside the reserve. "Freezing" development in the CKGR was one effective method. When the



borehole at !Xade, the largest community in the reserve, broke down, it took months before it was fixed. Buildings and roads were not maintained in the reserve, except for those going to Department of Wildlife and National Parks camps and mining exploration camps. According to local people the drought relief food programs were implemented more slowly and less effectively in the Central Kalahari than elsewhere in Botswana, a situation that threatened the well-being of people in several parts of the reserve.

The Department of Wildlife was also accused of intimidating the local people in the Central Kalahari and selectively enforcing wildlife conservation laws. Local people maintained that they were detained and arrested more frequently than other (non-San) people and they pointed out that they often received higher fines and stiffer jail sentences than did people who resided in towns and villages. This was the case, they argued, in spite of the fact that people from

towns were much more involved in hunting for meat and skins for sale than was the case for people in the Central Kalahari.

Even more disturbing than the high rates of arrest, were the charges that people have been mistreated by game scouts and other officials. There were a number of incidents where people claimed that they were tortured or received inhumane or degrading punishment when suspected of poaching or when being questioned about other people who might be engaged in illegal hunting. According to one report, the most common form of torture included the use of a rubber ring placed tightly around the testicles and a plastic bag placed over the face of a person. There were cases where people died of injuries inflicted upon them by Department of Wildlife and National Parks officials. Such an incident allegedly occurred at !Xade in August, 1993, when a 40 year-old man died after being detained and questioned at length by game scouts. Community leaders in the Central Kalahari have argued that authorities have stepped over the line from anti-poaching to persecution.

The government of Botswana maintained that the CKGR should become a game reserve and, as such, people living there should be resettled outside of the boundaries of the reserve. Their reasoning was that people and wildlife were incompatible in a game reserve, people in the Central Kalahari were no longer traditional because they now hunted with dogs and horses, it was too expensive to provide services to such a remote and scattered population, and more effective development assistance could be provided in a location that was closer to roads, air strips, and other infrastructure.

In order to encourage the people of the Central Kalahari to move to a location outside the reserve, the government of Botswana offered compensation to people. While there were

widespread rumors concerning the large amounts of compensation that would be provided, including "enough for a new four wheel drive vehicle," most payments made thus far have been at most, a few thousand Pula (around US \$1,000). Given the resources that people have had to give up when they moved out of the reserve, this amount is, according to local people, far below what would be required to re-establish themselves at a level at least equivalent to what they had while living in the reserve, (something that is required in World Bank guidelines on involuntary resettlement).

International assistance for projects in the Central Kalahari was recommended both by local people and by agencies working with them. In the early 1990s, efforts were made to get the IUCN, based in Switzerland, to declare the CKGR a Biosphere Reserve or a World Heritage Site in order for people to continue living there.

As a result of the planned resettlement proposals, the San and Bakgalagadi began to organize at the grassroots level to protest the plans and to recommend alternative scenarios, including ones in which local people would be allowed to continue to reside in the reserve and engage in community-based natural resource management and ecotourism activities. They sought international attention through going to meetings and holding press conferences. They also allied themselves with both local and outside organizations including Ditshwanelo, the Botswana Center for Human Rights, and Survival International in London.

In March 1997, the Botswana Minister of Local Government, Lands, and Housing requested a budget of 6 million Pula (about US \$1.5 million) to resettle people outside of the CKGR. Some of these funds were to be used in the development of New !Xade, a resettlement location outside of the CKGR in the Okwa Wildlife Management Area

in Ghanzi District. The resettlement of several hundred people out of !Xade to New !Xade was carried out in May, 1997. New !Xade consisted of little more than lines of tents and a water storage tank; there was no functioning borehole in the area and water had to be piped from some 60 kilometers away. According to people who were moved, little, if any attention was paid to local patterns of kinship and social organization in the move, and the distribution of people in the settlement was such that relatives and friends were sometimes separated from one another, something that was not the case in their former home.

There were numerous complaints about New !Xade. One of the most poignant of these was the fact that

Photo: Robert K. Hitchcock



A Kua man, caring for goats in the southern part of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

there were practically no trees at the new settlement and people had to walk long distances to obtain fuel wood and wild food plants. There were also complaints about the Land Board's slow response to the applications of resettled people for arable and residential plots in the settlement area. An additional problem, they point out, is the high level of alcohol sales by outside agencies and individuals in the settlement, which allegedly has contributed significantly to fights and to spouse and child abuse problems.

The people of the Central Kalahari have argued vociferously that their needs and the conservation goals of Botswana were not being met as a result of the policies being pursued. They pointed out that large numbers of tourists in four-wheel drive vehicles were now coming into the reserve and that the fragile pan and fossil river bed surfaces were being destroyed. They noted that more cattle were now seen in the reserve than was the case previously. They also expressed that the reason that they were being removed was so that well-to-do private citizens could set up lucrative safari camps in the reserve. Their worst fears began to be realized when they learned that a large-scale mining venture was being established at Gope in the southeastern corner of the CKGR and that a paved road from the DeBeers diamond mine at Orapa was being constructed.

It is ironic, local people argue, that the land and resources of the Central Kalahari are now being exploited not by the people who had lived there and managed the resources for generations, but rather by outsiders, including sizable numbers of tourists and mining companies. The question that local people ask is whether or not the government of Botswana actually intends to promote conservation of the CKGR, or whether it is using the conservation and sustainable development rhetoric as a means of getting other governments to go along with their efforts to promote the interests of large-scale, well-to-do agencies and individuals at the expense of the local communities.

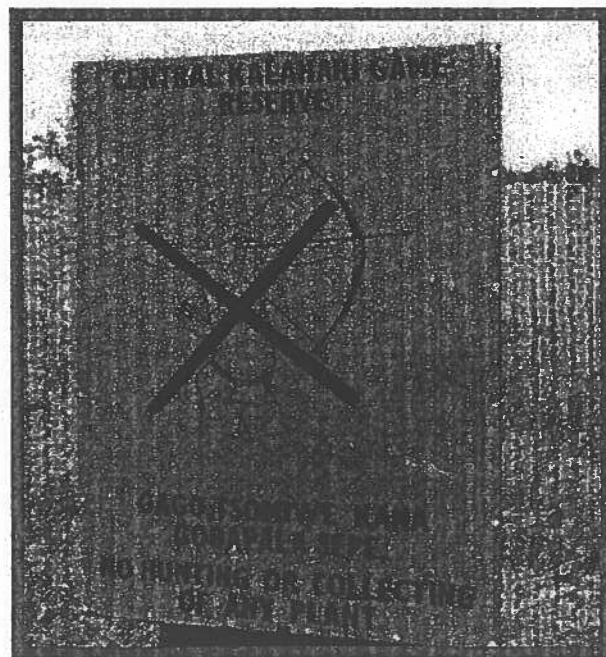
Community-Based Natural Resource Management Projects in Botswana

One of the ways that Botswana has attempted to deal with the problems of wildlife losses and environmental degradation is to establish community-based natural resource management programs (CBNRMPs) that aim to benefit local people. Various NGOs and development agencies, including the United States Agency for International Development and SNV, (the Netherlands Development Organization), have worked with district authorities and local communities in Botswana to set up and run projects that combine conservation and development. As of 1998, there were nine CBNRM projects in Botswana, some of which had been in place for a decade. In some cases, these projects had generated sizable amounts of income, several hundred thousand Pula per year, and the members of the communities received training and other kinds of technical assistance.

In the 1980s, the Kalahari Conservation Society, a Botswana-based NGO, provided assistance to a local group that wanted to establish a conservation area in a picturesque region of northeastern Botswana. Located on the northern tip of Sua Pan in the Makgadikgadi Pans region, what was to become the Nata Sanctuary is a picturesque area that consists of undulating plains, pans of clays and salts (45% of its surface area), and a strip gallery forest along the Nata River, which flows seasonally off the Zimbabwe Plateau. The area is known for its large numbers of migratory birds, especially flamingos and pelicans which use the area as a feeding ground and breeding area. The area also supports a variety of antelopes including springbok, impala, and kudu.

From the time the sanctuary idea was conceived in the mid-1980s, it was visualized as a biological reserve area where people other than tourists and staff members would be excluded. Planning the sanctuary did include some discussions with people in the immediate area, including Nata Village, which is six kilometers to the northwest, but it did not include consultations with the people from villages along the lower and middle stretches of the Nata River where some 2,000 people reside.

The Nata Sanctuary, which is 230 square kilometers in size, is located in an area that has long been used for a variety of purposes by Tyua foragers and Bamangwato and Kalanga agropastoralists. Besides Nata Village, which is close to the sanctuary, there are small villages and dispersed extended family compounds ranging in size from 10 to 120 people. The area was largely cattle post or *meraka* grazing land in the past, but some people also fished in the lower reaches of the Nata River in addition to hunting and collecting salt.



A sign erected on the road to !Xade in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

Photo: Robert K. Milder

Foraging continued to play a role in the diet and economies of local people, hence the importance of the sanctuary area to local communities. A wide range of fauna and flora were exploited, and some of these resources were important sources of income for local people. For example, palm leaves were used by women to make and then sell baskets.

A useful aspect of this project, according to the various organizations that supported it, was that it involved local and non-local people in land use and resource management decisions. However, questions were raised by people living in communities along the Nata River about access to the salt deposits in the Nata Delta that are now contained within the boundaries of the sanctuary. There have also been on-going conflicts about the collection of thatching grass, firewood, and the grazing of livestock inside the sanctuary's boundaries.

The Nata Lodge is nearby and benefits from the presence of the sanctuary and, in turn, supplies a restaurant and petrol station. Some local people work at the lodge, but few other benefits and no compensation have been provided to those people who lost access to resources within Nata Sanctuary. New tarred roads have been completed in the northern Kalahari linking Nata with Maun and Kasane. As a result, the numbers of tourists have increased significantly in what had been a fairly remote part of Botswana. These tourists are camping, using scarce firewood, and purchasing crafts, and thus impacting the environment and economies of local people.

Expanding the number of CBNRM projects, including the one in the Gweta area to the west of Nata, has resulted in an increased exploitation and sale of various wild plant products, including *marula*, a sweet fruit. Local groups have argued that the commercialization of these items has led to a reduction in the availability of these resources for use by the poor, especially San. Like a number of other community-based natural resource management programs in Africa, the Nata Sanctuary and the Gweta *marula* exploitation programs have served to undermine the degree to which local people have access to resources.

Conclusions

International development agencies such as the World Bank and governments of states like Botswana have often used rhetoric like "integrated conservation and development" to justify establishing programs that change the nature of land tenure from communal to either private (freehold or leasehold) or reserved. Environmental NGOs have used similar kinds of arguments to reduce the exploitation of natural resources by local communities or to have them removed from land that they deem should be preserved "for posterity." All too often, the goals of conservation and development are lost in efforts to promote large-scale tourism or other kinds of capital-intensive development.

As Braam LeRoux, a founding member of Kuru Development Trust (a development organization aimed at helping the Nharo San and other people of western

Botswana), has argued that it is important to carry out "community-owned development" in which local people have control over all aspects of development, from needs assessments to project planning, and from implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Building on the cultural values of the group or community is essential. Among San populations, there are basic principles by which these societies operate: respect for the land, sharing and reciprocal use and exchange of resources, consensus-based decision-making, and social equity. By incorporating these indigenous principles into a holistic development approach, it would be possible to bring about local empowerment and to promote sustainable, community-owned development rather than the kind of top-down, socially and environmentally destructive kinds of development that has characterized the livestock and conservation projects in Botswana.

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