



SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES

VOICES OF KHWE YOUNG WOMEN

Women's Leadership Centre





ABOUT THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CENTRE

The Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) is a feminist organisation based in Windhoek, Namibia. We envision a society in which all women actively engage in shaping the politics, practices and values of both public and private spaces. The WLC facilitates the voice, visibility and leadership of Namibian women through information sharing, education and training, advocacy and lobbying, research, writing, art, photography and the publishing of critical feminist texts which we distribute within our society.

Our organisation proposes a grassroots development of leadership among Namibian women, by supporting poor and marginalised women to form women's groups and to articulate their experiences and needs, informed by the knowledge of their human rights as women, as women and as citizens.

SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES: KHWE WOMEN'S VOICES PROJECT

With this project the Women's Leadership Centre aims to strengthen the voice and leadership of young Khwe women living in East Kavango / West Caprivi through education on their rights as women and as indigenous people. Using oral history activities, creative writing and photography, the young women will seek to answer the question: Through which stories and practices did we become the people that we are today?

The aim is to empower Khwe communities, particularly the young women, to learn from the past, in order to understand the present and envision a different future. Further, this project will build the capacity of Khwe young women to advocate and lobby at all levels for the implementation of women's rights and indigenous peoples' rights.

CONTACT DETAILS

Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) • PO Box 90675 • Windhoek • Namibia
Tel: +264 61 22 1106 • Email: elizabeth@wlc-namibia.org
www.wlc-namibia.org

This booklet was developed by Elizabeth /Khaxas and Liz Frank, informed by the work of the WLC in Khwe communities, with input from our partners. The booklet was sponsored by Norwegian Church Aid.

Photograph by Liz Frank. Design by Turipamwe Design. © WLC 2012





A Khwe elder in Omega

BACKGROUND

The Khwe are a sub-group of the Khoesan, the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa who constitute the most socially excluded sector of Namibian society. There are approximately 4000 Khwe people in East Kavango/West Caprivi regions, some of them living on and around former South African army bases that were built on their traditional land.

While traditionally, Khwe women belonged to a more egalitarian culture that gave them greater respect, power and autonomy, this changed fundamentally through inward migration from other parts of Africa, colonisation, apartheid and militarisation, which led to the loss of Khwe traditional lands, resources and livelihoods as nomadic hunter-gatherers. Reconciliation and restitution processes following national independence excluded the Khwe, whose traditional leaders are not recognised by the state.

Further, the patriarchal values, institutions and laws of the African settlers, the European and South African colonisers and their military, as well as Christianisation, impacted the dynamics of Khwe women's and men's social, economic and political roles, leading to a loss of cultural and individual identity. Yet women's agency has enabled them to survive, and to be more than victims of their circumstances. Celebrating the empowering cultural and historical legacy of Khwe women is an integral part of this project.

VOICES OF KHWE YOUNG WOMEN

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Although indigenous peoples have the right to own and control natural resources that sustain their livelihoods, our lives are marked by poverty and social exclusion. Many Khwe people live in the Bwabwata National Park, yet we are not allowed to hunt in the park or to gather in the core areas of the park. There are very few employment opportunities in our communities, and most of our people are unemployed.

Many of our grandmothers do not have IDs and are not registered to receive the old age pension. It is far and costly to travel to Katima Mulilo to get registered. Khwe people are hindered from accessing state services as there is little or no provision for translation into Khwedam. Sometimes we are humiliated and laughed at when we are speaking our language.

Due to poverty, girls start relationships at a young age in the hope of being provided for. Early marriages are common in our culture. Sometimes a girl can be forced by her parents to marry from as young as 12 years old. As a result we have high rates of teenage pregnancy and early motherhood, and most young women leave school before completing Grade 10. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty and exclusion.



Participants of a community dialogue facilitated by the WLC with the Omega Young Women's Group



Through the Speaking for Ourselves Project we are learning photography to document life experiences in our community

EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Khwe children in our communities are not educated in their mother tongue in the formal education system. While there are a few pre-primary schools operating in Khwedam, all Khwe school children are taught in Thimbukushu and English from Grade 1, even though there are Khwe teachers at some of our primary schools. There are no Khwe teachers at our secondary schools to motivate and inspire us as role models. Most of our schools have no Khwe teachers to inspire and motivate us as role models. This is a huge challenge for our young people, most of whom do not complete their formal education.

Poverty also hinders access to education, as families do not always receive exemption from school fees at primary level and there is no exemption at secondary level. Transport costs and hostel fees are also an obstacle for those learners who need to further their education away from their home villages. As a result, most of our children do not complete their formal education.

There is also a lack of adult education including literacy, as well as vocational education and skills training. This contributes to the continuing high levels of illiteracy, poverty and discrimination experienced by our people.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND MEDIA

Most people in our communities do not speak English or other Namibian languages well, yet there is no language service for Khwedam on the national radio and television, and we also do not have a community radio station through which people could access information. We are thus forced to live in ignorance and isolation from the rest of our country and the world.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, SAFETY AND SECURITY

Our communities are ravaged by preventable diseases such as TB, and there is a high rate of maternal and child mortality due to our lack of access to hospitals. Many of our children are malnourished because of poverty. There are only a few clinics, which are understaffed and under resourced, and do not provide translation services.

Alcohol addiction is a major problem among young and old, women and men, indicating the deep level of despair in which many people in our communities live. There are many cuca shops in our small communities profiting from this situation. Alcohol addiction leads to the lack of proper care for children, dropping out of school by the youth, and sugar daddy relationships in which young women provide sex for alcohol, often leading to violence against women. Many women who have been violated do not lay charges as the police officers do not speak their language, and some officers are themselves involved in committing acts of violence against our people, in particular young women.



We are educating ourselves and our community on indigenous women's rights

CLAIMING OUR RIGHTS AS INDIGENOUS WOMEN

The Namibian state has committed to the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as national and international laws and policies protecting the rights of women, including indigenous women.

We call on the Namibian state, the international community and non-governmental organisations to reach out to and collaborate with the Khwe communities in East Kavango / West Caprivi regions towards our goal of achieving full equality and rights as equal citizens of our country, specifically in the following areas:



We are learning to express ourselves in public

Comprehensive participatory research on the situation of Khwe women and young women with regard to poverty, education, livelihoods and employment, health and well-being, safety and security, with a view to identifying strategies for women's empowerment in all spheres of life.

Active promotion of respect, equality and non-discrimination between people of different races and ethnic groups in our communities.

Strengthening of positive indigenous identities to overcome feelings of shame, inferiority and internalised racism and sexism.

Access to culturally sensitive education at all levels through the provision of mother-tongue education at pre-primary and lower primary levels for all our children; the development of Khwedam as a school subject; relevant adult education and skills training, including parenting skills to help parents support their children in completing school. → →

WE NEED...

Increased access to all levels of education through the abolition of school and hostel fees; the provision of safe and habitable school hostels; and government subsidies for those who pass Grade 10 to complete senior secondary and tertiary education.

Provision of relevant vocational and life-skills education, financial and technical support, to enable our people to successfully run small businesses in our communities so as to break the cycle of poverty.

Strengthening access to justice through human rights/women's rights education for all, including the police; development of a community policing system, as well as training and support for community members to provide legal advice.

Promoting the health and well-being of our communities through improved nutrition and health services; the provision of programmes to overcome alcohol addiction, and closing the many shebeens.

Increased access to information through the establishment of a community radio station broadcasting in Khwedam, as well as specific programmes in Khwedam on the national broadcaster.

Improved access to culturally sensitive state services through training Khwe community members as support staff in the areas of education, health, welfare and justice; as well as the provision of incentives for educated and skilled Khwe professionals to plough back into their communities.

