

# Speaking for ourselves



**Voices of San young women in Namibia**

**Women's Leadership Centre**

# About the Women's Leadership Centre

The Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) is a feminist organisation based in Windhoek, Namibia. The WLC facilitates the voice and leadership of Namibian women through participatory research, training, writing, photography, and the publishing of critical feminist texts that we distribute within our society.

We promote feminist leadership and citizenship among women who are most marginalised, excluded and discriminated against in our society on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, geographic location, culture, age, gender expression and sexual orientation.

In our current programmes we work with San young women from indigenous communities in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, lesbian young women from across Namibia, as well as young women living under customary law and exposed to harmful cultural practices in Zambezi Region, north-eastern Namibia.

This booklet was compiled by Elizabeth Ikhaxas and Liz Frank.

The poetry, songs and images in this booklet were produced during Women's Rights, Culture and Leadership Workshops with San young women in Omega 1 and Windhoek conducted by the Women's Leadership Centre in 2012 and 2013. Most of the poems were written collectively.

Design by Wordweaver Publishing House

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ISBN: 978-99916-845-4-3

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The WLC thanks Norwegian Church Aid, the Embassy of Spain and AECID Spanish Cooperation Office for supporting this project.





## *Speaking for ourselves – Voices of San young women in Namibia*

With this programme, the Women's Leadership Centre works to strengthen the voice and feminist leadership of San young women living in diverse communities in Namibia through education on their human rights as women and as indigenous peoples.

Using oral history, creative writing, dance and photography, the young women are guided to answer the question: Through which stories and practices did we become the people that we are today? Learning from the past enables us to better understand the present, and to envision different futures.

Our strategy is to strengthen the resilience and resistance of San young women to all forms of discrimination and social exclusion, and build their feminist leadership capacity to **speak for themselves** in advocating for their rights as equal citizens of their country.

With this booklet we aim to share the work of the Women's Leadership Centre in this programme with participating indigenous communities across Namibia, and our partners and stakeholders. We also want to showcase the success stories of San young women through their poetry, songs and photography, as an inspiration for others to follow in their footsteps.

## Knowing our history makes us strong

We, the San peoples, are the first peoples of Southern Africa. We lived in small family groups as hunters and gatherers, using the natural resources in our environment for our survival and well-being. We developed a deep knowledge of our land, and had a respectful and spiritual relationship with the plants and animals that nurtured us.

Women and men shared the responsibility of searching for food, and our relationships were based on respect and equality. Women had power and autonomy in our communities, they were providers and healers.

The independent and autonomous lives of our people changed over time, as new groups of people began to migrate to our lands from other parts of Africa, taking more and more land for growing crops and grazing their livestock.

Then came settlers and soldiers from Germany, and later from South Africa, who colonised our land and turned our people into slaves and foot soldiers. They even made a law that gave permission for white people to shoot and kill our people because they did not see us as equal human beings who have dignity and rights.

In this way our San communities lost our independent way of life that had sustained us for thousands of years. Our people became dependent on wage labour and government aid for our survival. San women became dependent on men, who gained power as our way of life changed and our communities took on the patriarchal values of our neighbouring ethnic groups and colonisers.

When our country gained its independence from South African apartheid rule 24 years ago, our people had hopes that our lives would become better as equal citizens of this new nation.

But today most of our people are still living in abject poverty, ill health and despair, excluded from education and access to resources through which we can rebuild our dignity and reclaim our humanity.

By coming together as San young women from different communities across Namibia and learning about our history, our cultural heritage and our rights, we are beginning to find our voice and exercise leadership in our communities to bring about the future that we envision.

We invite all San young women in Namibia and southern Africa to join us on this journey!

## Khwe Creation Song

Long long ago  
The first woman and man  
Were created at  
Our sacred birth place  
Long long ago  
There was a time  
When we were free  
We owned this land  
We the first peoples  
of Southern Africa!

Our peace did not last forever  
We heard the thunder of war!

First came the Bantu peoples  
They took our land  
And made us slaves  
Then came the Germans  
They took more land  
And killed our ancestors



Then came the Boers  
They built army bases on our land  
And forced our fathers and brothers  
Into their war against our people

This violent history  
Is still here with us today  
They took our land  
Made it a national park  
We cannot hunt there  
We cannot gather as we please

They pushed us into poverty  
They took our independence!  
They took our freedom!

# Knowing our rights gives us power

When Namibia became independent, new laws were adopted to protect the human rights of all people in our country. We all have the right to life and liberty, and to choose our own path to happiness.

The human rights of all women, children and men in Namibia are protected by our Constitution, our supreme law, which was adopted in 1990 when our country achieved independence.

## What are our human rights?

- ◆ We all have the **right to dignity**, to be treated with **respect**, and to be **free from torture** and **degrading treatment**. This means that we may not be beaten, humiliated or abused in any way.
- ◆ We all have the **right to equality**. This means that discrimination against San people based on racism, and discrimination against San girls and women based on sexism, must be stopped.
- ◆ Both girls and boys have the same **right to education**. This means that girls may not be taken out of school to undergo cultural practices or do domestic work, and they may not be excluded due to early motherhood.
- ◆ Both women and men have the same **right to choose our marriage partner**, and to **equality in marriage**. This means that young women may not be forced into child marriage. Child marriage is illegal. In Namibia, the age of consent to marriage is 18 years.
- ◆ We all have the **right to information**, which includes information about our human rights and all the laws that protect our rights, and about all the services the state must provide for us to lead healthy and happy lives.
- ◆ We all have the right to **freedom of expression**: to speak our mind, as well as the **right to participate in decision making** about our own lives and the development of our communities.

**Racism**: the belief that people of one race are superior to people of other races and should rule over them

**Sexism**: the belief that men are superior to women and should rule over them



## Song of discrimination

In our country Namibia  
Some people do not see us  
As human beings

We never thought  
We would be  
Suffering like this!

## Our leaders

Our leaders  
Are not recognised  
We are far from the people in power  
Far away in the Bwabwata National Park  
We ask the President to give us land  
And to recognise our leaders!

## International protections of our rights

Namibia has also adopted international agreements that protect our rights as indigenous peoples, and as women. One of these is the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**.

### What is the United Nations?

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation with 193 countries as member states. The UN is a platform for countries to discuss and take decisions on a number of important issues. It plays a key role in keeping peace throughout the world and helping governments work together to improve the lives of people who live in their countries.

Countries that form part of the UN take decisions through the United Nations General Assembly, which is like a world parliament. Sometimes these decisions are documented as **declarations** or **conventions**.

### What is a declaration?

A declaration is an agreement among countries about a specific issue.

### Who are indigenous peoples?

Indigenous peoples are descendants of the original people or occupants of lands before these lands were taken over or conquered by others.

Many indigenous peoples have maintained their traditional cultures and identities and have a strong connection with their ancestral territories and ways of life.

For the approximately 370 million indigenous peoples in some 90 countries around the world, the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** is an expression of our rights and place in the global community. The cultural and linguistic heritage of indigenous peoples contributes to the world's diversity.

Our knowledge and practices have enhanced respect for the environment and the natural resources of the world's communities, food security, health and education. Indigenous peoples' knowledge of traditional medicines, for example, has contributed immensely to protecting the health of both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.



# UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** addresses the most significant issues affecting indigenous peoples: **our civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights**. It also bears on our **right to self-determination, spirituality, language, lands, territories, resources and free, prior and informed consent**. It is important that we, indigenous young women, understand our rights as protected in this Declaration.

**Did you know?** Indigenous peoples use the term 'peoples' because it is closely linked to the recognition of our distinct identity, our possessing both individual human rights and collective rights, and our right to self-determination.

## The right to self-determination

Self-determination means that indigenous peoples have the right to make our own decisions on issues that concern us, and carry them out in the way that will be meaningful to us as indigenous peoples, while being respectful of the human rights of our community members and other peoples as well.

## Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Special Rapporteur is a senior UN expert on indigenous issues who promotes indigenous peoples' rights, reports on their situation worldwide, and addresses specific cases where their rights may have been violated.

**Did you know?** Any person, group or organisation can send information on specific cases where the rights of indigenous peoples may have been violated to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2011 the **Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** visited Namibia to report on progress our government is making in supporting and respecting indigenous peoples' rights. However, his report makes very little reference to the rights of indigenous women, even though women's rights are specifically protected in **CEDAW**, another international agreement signed by our government (see next page).

Source for this section: *Know your rights! United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for indigenous adolescents*. UNICEF 2003

# The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Namibia has also adopted **the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**.

By adopting CEDAW, our state has agreed to change all **laws, customary beliefs and practices** that discriminate against women. Girls and women must have the same access as boys and men to education and training, health services, employment, land and resources, and participation in decision making.

The belief that men are superior to women must be changed to promote equal relations of mutual respect between women and men.

Article 14 of CEDAW focuses on the particular problems faced by **rural women** and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families.

**Rural women have the right:**

- ◆ To participate in development planning and community activities;
- ◆ To have access to good health care facilities, information, counselling and family planning services, and to benefit from social security programmes;
- ◆ To obtain all types of training and education, and have access to all community and extension services;
- ◆ To enjoy adequate living conditions regarding housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

A **convention** is a binding agreement. Our government must report every four years to the **CEDAW Committee** on progress towards the achievement of women's rights in our country. NGOs such as the Women's Leadership Centre can also report to the CEDAW Committee on what needs to be done to protect the human rights of all women. An NGO report to the CEDAW Committee is called a **Shadow Report**.

Through the San Young Women' Voices Programme we can together do research on the situation of San young women in Namibia and develop a CEDAW Shadow Report to make our voices heard!



## Reclaiming the power of our grandmothers!

### **Khwe**

Khwe, are we not human?  
Are we not Khwe?  
Forgotten by Namibia  
Ashamed of our culture  
Our way of life

Let us  
Reclaim our Khwe-ness  
Reclaim our humanity  
First peoples of Namibia!

### **Grandmother**

Grandmother you taught me  
So many things  
Telling stories of our culture  
How to collect berries  
And respect all people

Grandmother  
Now you are forgotten  
No pension for you!

## Our economic rights and empowerment

*Indigenous peoples have the right to own and develop their land and resources. Governments will legally recognize and protect these lands and resources. UNDRIP Article 26*

*Rural women have the right to organise self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment. They also have the right to have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes. CEDAW Article 14*

Although as indigenous peoples we have the right to own and control our natural resources, we have lost most of the land and resources that sustained our people over thousands of years.

Our lives are marked by extreme poverty and social exclusion: we are excluded from achieving our economic, political, social and cultural rights and participating in the social life of our country.

Many of us now live in conservancies or on resettlement farms where we lack tools, equipment and training to grow our own food and take good care of our livestock.

Some of us do domestic and farm work on private farms, where we earn unfair wages. Sometimes farm owners from other ethnic group treat us as slaves - some even exploit San girls and young women as sex slaves.

There are few employment opportunities in our communities, and most of our people are unemployed. Women have the extra burden of caring for our families while trying to earn a living. We need more support from men with the household chores.

Many of our grandmothers do not have IDs and are not registered to receive the Old Age Pension. San people are hindered from accessing state services by the lack of translation provision into our own languages. Sometimes we are humiliated when we speak our own languages.

We need to come together as young women in our communities and explore possibilities for starting our own income generating projects, and where to get the skills training, financial and technical support we will require.



## Poverty

Poverty - do I see you  
In the swollen tummy  
Of my baby girl?  
Poverty - do I see you in the  
Starved bodies of my people?  
Poverty - do I see you in the  
TB infected bodies  
Of my people?  
Poverty - do I see you in the  
Thousand teenage mothers?  
I see poverty in so many  
Early marriages

## Hunger

I am poor  
I am hungry  
There is no food in the house  
I go around asking for food  
But people chase me out of  
Their houses!

## Our right to health and well-being

*Indigenous peoples have the right to access health care and social services, such as getting prenatal care, going to the doctor or social worker or getting help with food and housing, without discrimination. UNDRIP Article 24*

*States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding. CEDAW Article 12*

*Health in its broader sense is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. World Health Organisation*

Our communities are ravaged by preventable diseases such as TB, HIV and Aids. Many mothers and babies die during childbirth due to our lack of access to adequate health services, clean water, sanitation, and the malnourishment of our children because of poverty.

The clinics in our communities are often understaffed and have few resources, and most of the staff are not from our communities and do not speak our languages. When we have to use interpreters at clinics and hospitals we have no privacy about our health matters.

Alcohol addiction is a major problem among our people: young and old, women and men. This shows the deep level of hopelessness and despair of our people, caused by poverty and social exclusion. This is increased through the stigma and discrimination we experience every day from people of other ethnic and racial groups who treat us as less than human.

We have no control over the many cuca shops owned by non-indigenous people in our small communities, who are profiting from this situation.

Alcohol addiction and drug abuse affects us in many ways. We are dropping out of school; we are neglecting our children – even feeding them alcohol instead of providing them with proper food, and we are having sugar daddy relationships for alcohol, which often leads to violence against us.

We urgently need access to adequate and appropriate health services that can provide holistic health care including counselling in our own languages.



## The girls of Omega

The girls of Omega

No employment

No education

Only poverty do they know

Only alcohol do they know

Only waiting for men

To give them something

The girls of Omega

They forgot the ways

Of their grandmothers

The girls of the night

Stop drinking!

Stop smoking!

Stop having children as teenagers!

Complete your education

You are someone!

## Alcohol

Alcohol

You got us!

We do your will

Stealing, fighting

Sleeping around...

Neglecting our children

Destroying ourselves!

Let's protect ourselves

From alcohol

And find happiness

In ourselves!

# Our sexual rights and health

All people, including indigenous peoples, have the right to be in control of our bodies, our sexual interactions and our relationships!

- ◆ We have the right to decide when we are ready for sex, and to enjoy sex.
- ◆ We have the right to choose our sexual partners.
- ◆ We have the right to choose our marriage partners, or to choose not to marry. In Namibia, the age of consent to marriage is 18 years.
- ◆ We have the right to say no to sex, even if we are married or in a relationship, and even if we have had sex with this person before.
- ◆ We have the right to be free from all forms of sexual violence.
- ◆ We have the right to protect ourselves from harmful sexual practices, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies.

## The dangers of practising dry sex

Some of us insert herbs or chemicals into our vaginas to practise dry sex. This prevents the natural lubrication of the vagina, and can irritate and damage the vagina wall, causing sores and infections. As condoms cannot be used during dry sex, this exposes us to the additional risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV and HPV, the virus which can cause cervical cancer.

## HPV and cervical cancer

**HPV (human papillomavirus)** is another sexually transmitted infection that is very common in our communities. HPV can cause genital warts as well as cervical cancer. The cervix is situated at the opening to a woman's uterus (the womb). Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in Namibia after breast cancer, and can occur in young women.

Condoms can be useful for the prevention of HPV. There is also a vaccination to prevent cervical cancer, which should be available in health centres across Namibia soon. This vaccination is most effective if given at an early age, before a girl starts to have sex.

From around 21 years of age it is important for women to have regular **pap smears** to check that the cervix is healthy. This can detect any changes in the cervix at an early stage and help to prevent getting cervical cancer.



## A new initiation song

We bless you  
Our daughter  
Who is becoming a woman today  
Know that your body is yours  
No-one can touch it without your  
permission!

Take good care of yourself  
Because we love you  
Know that you have a fine mind  
Khwé people are so clever  
Use your intellect  
And your power within  
To make choices that are  
Good for you!

Stay away from men  
Say no to sex  
Until you are ready

When you finish your education  
Go for further study  
And bring back your knowledge  
Become a doctor in our community  
So we can speak to you about our  
Health in our own language

You have the right to be  
A leader of our people  
We wish you a happy and long life!



## Our reproductive rights

All people, including indigenous peoples, have the right to practise healthy and safe contraception, to experience wanted and safe pregnancy and child birth.

### Our reproductive rights are:

- ◆ Having factual and relevant information about pregnancy, fertility and contraception
- ◆ Being able to make choices including whether or not to have children, how many children we want, when we want children and with whom we want children
- ◆ Being able to get help to fall pregnant if we are unable to do so
- ◆ Having access to family planning options that suit us. We need to be able to choose if we want to use contraception, and which form of contraception we want
- ◆ Having good health care when we are pregnant, giving birth and breast feeding
- ◆ Having access to safe and non-judgemental services to terminate an unwanted pregnancy (have an abortion). This right is still very limited in Namibia.

The right to terminate a pregnancy is still very limited in Namibia. Currently a girl or woman can request a legal termination of pregnancy in Namibia if there is:

- A serious threat to the women's life or health; or
- A serious risk that the child will suffer from a mental or physical defect that will result in a serious and irreparable handicap; or
- Where the pregnancy is the result of rape, incest or intercourse with a woman who has a severe mental disorder.

## Teenage mother

Teenage mother  
You never thought  
Of your future  
Now you are pregnant  
Now you are disappointed  
Ashamed - when your friends  
Go to school  
You want to hide  
Yourself from the world

The deed is done  
Now you are pregnant  
Do not lose hope  
Always turn to education

You are a woman  
A mother  
Prevent the same mistakes  
In your child's life!



## Dry sex

I did not know that dry sex is bad  
But today I learnt more about dry sex  
Now I know that dry sex can  
Cause HIV and cancer  
It is not good for a young woman  
To put herbs in her vagina  
My sisters  
Let's stop dry sex  
And live!

## Our right to education and training

*Governments must ensure that indigenous peoples – particularly children – get the same benefit from the education system as others in ways that respect indigenous cultures, languages and rights. UNDRIP Article 14*

*Equality between girls and boys, women and men shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training. CEDAW Article 12*

While there are a few pre-primary schools operating in indigenous San languages, children in most of our communities are not taught in their mother tongue in the primary school, which means that they start school in languages and cultural environments that are foreign to them and which do not value their language and cultural knowledge.

This puts our children at a great disadvantage, as mother-tongue education at the lower primary level lays an important foundation for further learning. It also means that our languages are dying out.

Poverty also hinders our access to education, as most of our families cannot afford to pay for school fees for secondary level. Transport costs and hostel fees are also an obstacle for those learners who need to move away from their home villages to access secondary education. Girls also lack the money to buy toiletries and sanitary articles. As a result, most of our children do not complete their formal education.

We also have little access to adult education including literacy classes, as well as vocational education and skills training. This contributes to the continuing high levels of illiteracy, poverty and discrimination experienced by our people, especially women.

### **I dream of a world**

I dream of world in which I  
become somebody  
Somebody who is educated  
I dream of a world  
In which I help myself  
Becoming independent!

## My voice

You say we are not educated  
We, the Khwe young women  
Of Namibia  
But you deny us education  
We have a right to education  
And vocational training  
But you deny us education  
You deny us the right to  
Learn in Khwedam,  
our own language  
You deny us  
The right to information  
In our own language  
Why do we not hear Khwedam  
On the NBC?

We have the right to work  
We have the right to life  
And a good living

## My right to education

Our constitution says  
All people have the right to education  
I want to study further  
To complete my education

NAMCOL

You are too far from my village  
Poor young women have no money for  
transport and books



NAMCOL

Come to Omega

So we Khwe women can finish  
our education

We want to study at UNAM

We want to find good work

We want to become independent

We want to become leaders

And lead the life that we choose

Education

I love you so much!

# Our right to safety and security

*Governments will ensure that indigenous women and children are free from all forms of violence and discrimination. UNDRIP Article 22*

## Domestic violence and rape

Many women and girls in Namibia experience domestic violence and rape, including girls and women in our indigenous communities. This was not the case in the past, when women and men had more equal relationships.

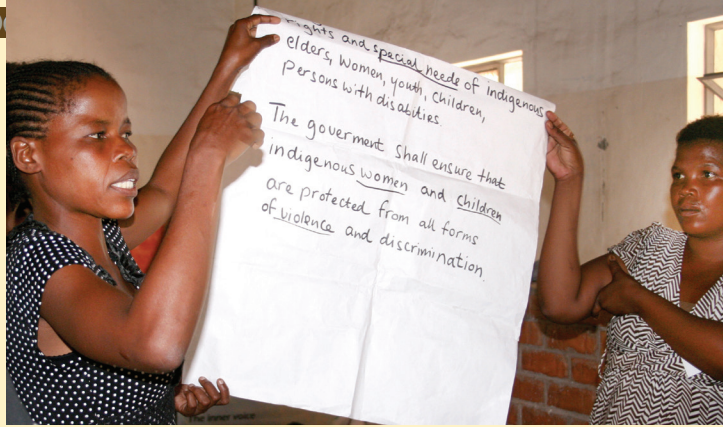
## Violence through child marriage

In some of our families we still practise child marriage, which violates the human rights of girls and is illegal in Namibia. Through child marriage girls may be exposed to daily sexual abuse including rape. Girls who are married to older men do not have the power to protect themselves from pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and Aids. Early pregnancy presents a high risk of death during childbirth, especially if the girl is below 15 years old when she gives birth.

## Lateral violence

Violence breeds violence, including in our indigenous peoples' relationships. Many violent actions are taking place within our own homes, families and communities. We turn against each other, insulting each other, spreading lies and rumours, shaming and putting each other down, blaming each other, bullying and gossiping about each other and hating each other. Even women are sometimes beating each other. This kind of behaviour is called lateral violence, which happens when people are discriminated against and treated cruelly over a long period of time.

Thus experiences of violence and discrimination lead to lateral violence which results in silencing, anger, anxiety, losing confidence in our own abilities, including our ability to make choices, speak and act to protect ourselves. We have to break the cycle of violence against each other and transform our communities.



## What allows violence to happen in our communities?

According to various studies, causes of violence among our San people are the following:

**Belief in the superiority of men:** Many of our people have taken on the belief held by other ethnic groups that men are superior to women.

**Men's family roles as decision makers:** Men are considered to be the breadwinners, heads of their households and decision makers, who have the right to own and control women. Girls are taught through initiation rites to be quiet and submissive to men.

**The impact of extreme poverty and racism:** Most San men have lost their livelihoods as hunters and have little access to paid work. They belong to the poorest of the poor in Namibia, and experience racism, ethnic discrimination and social exclusion. This may lead to frustration and anger among men, which together with alcohol and drug abuse may result in violence between men as well as violence against women and children.

**Targeting of San women by non-San men:** San girls and women are sexualised and targeted for sexual abuse by men from other ethnic groups, who see us as 'free for all', and powerless to protect ourselves. When we have children with them they often abandon us and the children, but sometimes take the children away from us when they are older without our consent.

**Lack of safe spaces and police protection:** There are no safe spaces or shelters in our communities for women who have experienced violence, and most girls and women do not lay charges as we do not know our rights under the law. Most police officers do not speak our languages, and some do not treat us with respect and dignity and are themselves involved in committing acts of violence against our people, including the rape of young women.

## What does the law say?

Namibia has passed two major laws that aim to combat violence.

The **Combating of Domestic Violence Act** prohibits all forms of violence in domestic relationships, such as between couples who are married or living together, or by parents and grandparents against their children and grandchildren.

This law prohibits all forms of **physical abuse**, such as beating or kicking.

The law also forbids **emotional and verbal abuse**, for example humiliating and embarrassing a person through repeated insults.

Under the **Combating of Rape Act**, no-one is allowed to force us into having sex: not our boyfriends, husbands, male relatives or any strangers.

**Forced sex of any kind is rape.** Marriage is no excuse for rape. Rape is a serious crime that must be punished.

**It is also considered rape** if one person is under the age of 14 years and the other person is more than 3 years older, even if both people agree to sex.

**It is a sexual offence** to have sexual contact with a person under the age of 16 when the other person is more than 3 years older, even if both people agree to have sex.

However, these laws have not yet been **consistently implemented and enforced in Namibia**, and are ineffective for women in rural communities who experience violence, including through cultural practices.

## What to do if you are raped

Rape is a serious crime. Report the rape to the Women and Child Protection Unit or the police as soon as possible. You will also need to see a doctor or nurse.

If you have been raped, you may need to be tested for HIV and you may be given **PEP**. This medicine can help prevent HIV infection. You need to start the PEP treatment within 72 hours (3 days) of the rape, so you need to get to a clinic as soon as possible. Going to a clinic quickly is also important to receive **contraception** to prevent getting pregnant through rape. If you cannot receive the contraception, you should get a pregnancy test right away if your next period is late, and you should tell your doctor if you want to terminate the pregnancy (have an abortion).





## Finding our own solutions to violence

In communities where we experience violence committed by police officers and others against San people, we need to find ways to document this violence and report it to the senior police commissioners and the Office of the Ombudsman, whose duty it is to investigate abuses of our human rights.

As it may take a long time to get violent police officers removed from our communities, we also need to try and solve our problems with domestic violence within our own San community structures.

In order to this, we need to open up the taboos and silences and start sharing our own experiences of domestic violence and rape as San young women. For this we need to create safe spaces together with a trusted group. Through our sharing we will learn that we are not alone with our pain, and our need for justice and healing.

Through coming together we can build courage, solidarity and sisterhood. We can stand by one another in cases of violence, giving each other shelter and support. Together we can shame the perpetrators, and talk to them about their own need for healing from racist stigma and discrimination.

We can engage our spiritual and traditional leaders, and hold community meetings to find solutions. Together we can challenge the alcohol and drug abuse in our communities.

Through writing our stories, creating new songs and dances, photography, community theatre and other art forms we can strengthen our resilience and resistance to stigma and discrimination. We can find our power within, and heal.

# Reclaiming our cultural identity and healing ourselves

*Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revive their culture and traditions. Governments will work with indigenous peoples to ensure indigenous property rights to their cultures, knowledge, spiritual and religious traditions are respected. UNDRIP Article 11*

*Every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms in this Constitution and further subject to the condition that the rights protected by this article do not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest. Constitution of the Republic of Namibia Article 19*

All Namibians, including indigenous peoples, have the right to culture. Culture is closely linked with our identity. Knowing who we are and where we come from gives us an important foundation in our lives in creating new futures.

Through the loss of our traditional way of life as hunter gatherers, our peoples are losing many aspects of our unique cultures: our knowledge of our land, our respectful and spiritual relationship with our natural environment, our languages, the power and agency of women as providers, leaders and healers.

We are strengthening our cultural identities, resilience and voice through writing new songs and creating new dances that empower us and lead to healing. Through our creative voice we are advocating for our rights and expressing our dreams and visions.

## **We want peace and reconciliation**

We cannot be silent anymore

Many San people are dying

Alcohol abuse is killing us

TB – HIV/Aids and dagga are killing us

Suicide is everyday news

We are experiencing too much

Violence and discrimination

We want peace now – Namibia

We want forgiveness now – Namibia

We need healing now - Namibia



## Honouring our grandmothers

The lives of our grandmothers

Their independence

Their most valued and

Respected lives

In Khoesan communities

Are worth honouring

At a time when the term

Gender equality

Was unknown

In the world

You, grandmother

Lived your life freely

With dignity

We celebrate

The seed

Of freedom

Our grandmothers

Planted

In our heart and minds!

## Our right to participation and leadership

*Indigenous peoples have the right to take part in decision-making in all matters affecting them. This includes the rights of indigenous peoples to select who represents them and to have indigenous decision-making processes respected.*

UNDRIP Article 18

As San women and young women we have been excluded from decision making structures at all levels. In our communities traditional leaders are mostly men. We have to break with the belief that a 'good' woman is silent, obedient and follows the lead of her husband. As young women we need to have a say in all matters concerning our lives, in our homes, communities and in our country.

### Becoming feminist leaders

Through training by the Women's Leadership Centre and taking actions in our own communities we are becoming feminist leaders and active citizens who understand how power operates in the experiences of discrimination and oppression of indigenous women within and outside our communities.

We are reclaiming our voice and our egalitarian values and sharing the Khoesan feminist ideologies so that we can all become strong agents of change and justice in our communities and in wider Namibia.

### Organising and speaking for ourselves

We have started to create women's groups in our communities, safe spaces where we dream of the world our children can inherit, where we learn to trust each other, build solidarity and sisterhood, and practise resistance. We are teaching each other our human rights and looking for our own solutions to the everyday challenges we are facing.

### The values of our feminist leadership

- We stand for peace and non-violence
- We stand for equality and inclusion for all
- We believe that a different world is possible in which all people have access to food, shelter, education and livelihoods.
- We believe in respect and dignity of all people
- We believe in our power and agency to bring about change
- We believe in sisterhood and solidarity

## Hear my voice

Oh Namibians  
This is my voice  
My voice as a Khwe young woman  
Crying for freedom from you people  
Namibians  
Do you hear my loud voice  
Namibians  
Are you still ignoring my voice  
Disrespecting me and my people  
Namibians  
This is my voice  
Crying with my hunger voice  
Shouting with my poverty voice

Namibia  
Our young people are getting HIV  
at a young age  
Because we are poor  
Poverty takes away our power  
To demand for a condom  
Namibia  
Our sister Namibia  
What have we done  
That you punish us so much  
Let's leave our past behind us  
Do not ignore us any longer  
We claim our right to live a happy life!  
Today hear my voice!  
The powerful voice  
Of a Khwe young woman!



## Look at us now

Look at us now  
The indigenous young women  
Of Namibia  
How we have grown  
Sisters in solidarity  
Struggling together  
To sustain our lives and  
The environment  
For the futures  
Of all our children!

# We have awakened!

## Success stories told by Khwe young women

We live in a village called Omega 1, in the Bwabwata National Park in Zambezi Region. We learnt about women's rights and leadership in a workshop held by the Women's Leadership Centre in our village in 2012. In that workshop we talked about all the challenges we are facing and understood that we needed to form a group and discuss what we can do.

We learnt that we can be powerful if we stand together. Our group is called Omega Women's Empowerment Team.

Here are some of the actions we have taken to assert the human rights of our people.

## Stopping human trafficking

We heard that a man working at the school hostel took five girls from our village and sent them to Katima Mulilo and Windhoek to become domestic workers without their parents' knowledge. We went to the police to lay a charge, and together with the supervisor of the crèche at the Catholic Mission and the Women and Child Protection Unit we were able to bring four of the girls back home, they were between 12 and 14 years old. The fifth one is still in Katima Mulilo where the people are taking good care of her and have sent her back to school.

## Marching for our dignity and rights

We were also very involved in the case of the young Khwe man who was beaten up by police so badly for stealing a chicken that he collapsed and had to be taken to Andara Hospital. Other young men caught with stolen chickens - who were Mbukushu, not Khwe - were let go by the police without harm. Two of our group members found the young man unconscious on the street. The police said that he collapsed from hunger but everyone could see that he was beaten.

Our group met to discuss this case of discrimination and torture, and we decided to organise a march in Omega 1. We put up notices on the trees all over the village to invite people to participate in the march. We wrote a letter to the police to get permission for the march.



Everyone in Omega 1 came to the march, more than 500 people, young and old. Even the Mbukushu people supported us!

Our group was leading the march. Police from other areas came especially to Omega 1 to escort the marchers. We were happy to see so many people supporting us! We will always be able to speak up for ourselves and our people.

We handed a statement to the police calling for the removal of police officers who are mistreating the people from our village. We are still waiting for a response.

## **Defending our right to education**

At the beginning of the school year in 2014, our group was able to negotiate the right of some of our children to access further levels of educations with schools in our villages.

## **Participating in decision making**

Members of the Kayaramacan Association which works for the interests of the Khwe people in our region requested our group to attend its meetings. By strongly collaborating with this organisation we are becoming well-informed about the important matters for our community, and about their plans for the community. When attending a meeting in Omega 3 our group raised the issue that this association has only employed men. We requested that they also employ women. Not long after this four women were employed, not from our group – but we were very happy.

## **Our people can do the work**

When drought relief food was delivered to our village, only people of other ethnic groups were employed to unload the trucks. We spoke to the people in charge, saying that local Khwe people can do this work easily and that there was no need to employ people from outside for such jobs. As a result of our action, two San men were employed to do the work.

## **Involving our community**

When we see a problem in the community we usually call a community meeting. From last year up till now (March 2014) we have called six meetings attended approximately by 20-25 people each. The participants are mostly elderly people. We will have an agenda to guide the meetings. However, the participants of our meetings also give us ideas. It is the first time in Omega 1 that people are coming together to work collectively to address our challenges and problems.

## **Our plans**

The work of our group is very relevant in Omega 1. We have lots of challenges facing us and we are ready to meet them.

We are planning to go to Rundu to meet with our Regional Councillor about the importance to also appoint marginalised people such as the Khwe in the police. At the moment people are only recruited from other ethnic groups and our people are overlooked.

We want to talk to shebeen owners not to sell alcohol to children or allow children to play jackpot and other games at the shebeens. Children don't belong in shebeens.

We are also planning a cleaning up campaign for Omega 1. We want to clean our surroundings so people can be proud of our village.





## Projects we want to start

**Gardening project:** The Catholic Mission will teach us gardening skills on their land and in the meantime we will apply for gardening land. We need help with seeds and fertiliser.

**Bread baking project:** The mission is also prepared to teach us bread baking skills. Thereafter we will need help with construction of the ovens and with equipment.

**Creative projects:** The Women's Leadership Centre will teach us more photography skills and we will take photos of our own people and sell them as postcards to the tourists. We also need a craft centre in Omega 1. We want to learn craft skills from our grandmothers. We are very good with creative things such as painting but need sponsorship with materials.

**Women's centre:** We will apply to have an old house that we can use as our office and meeting space. We need help to renovate this old house and assistance with furniture.

**Children's shelter:** We also want to start a shelter for neglected children.

The success stories and plans of the Omega 1 Women's Empowerment Team were shared by Sabina Skous, Magreth Kamba, Anitha Dinyando, Patricia Dinyando, Sophia Samboko, Christacia Mushavanga, Annie Shakoyi, Lisa Daniel, Lisedi Samboko, Anna Munundo and Anna Buttie.

# Holding our government accountable to San young 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 San communities across Namibia towards our goal of achieving full equality and rights as equal citizens of our country, specifically in the following areas:

**Comprehensive participatory research** on the situation of San 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 San languages as school subjects; relevant adult education and skills training, including parenting skills to help parents support their children in completing school.

**Increased access to secondary 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 drug and alcohol addiction, and closing the many shebeens.

**Increased access to information** through the establishment of community radio stations broadcasting in our languages, where this is not yet the case, as well as specific programmes in our languages on the national broadcaster.

**Improved access to culturally sensitive state services** through training San 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 San professionals to plough back into their communities.

