

The Situation of Indigenous San Young Women in Namibia

An Alternative Report to the CEDAW Committee

Produced by the Women Leadership Centre, Namibia

Contact:

Elizabeth Khaxas, Director elizabeth.1wlc@gmail.com www.wlc-namibia.org

Supported by the Namibia San Council

Contact:

Kileni Fernando, Coordinator kileni.fernando@gmail.com www.sancouncil.com

Acknowledgement

This report is dedicated to the San young women leaders who struggle against all types of oppression, discrimination and violence while working for peace, equality, justice and freedom for their fellow San sisters and their people. They also collected the stories on which this report is based.

Windhoek, 15 February 2021



Contents

Introduction and the preparation process	3
The context and situation of San young women in Namibia	4
CEDAW Articles 1-3 and 5: Discrimination, human rights, gender inequality, sex roles and stereotypes	4
CEDAW General Recommendation 28: Racial/ethnic inequality and stereotyping of San people	5
CEDAW Article 3: Legal framework to advance women	6
CEDAW Articles 4, 7 and 11: Temporary special measures, participation in leadership and decision making and employment	7
CEDAW Articles 4, 6, 16, General Recommendation no 19: Violence, trafficking, child marriage and access to justice	8
CEDAW Article 9: Nationality	9
CEDAW Article 10: Equal rights in education	10
CEDAW Article 12: Health care and family planning	12
CEDAW Article 13: Economic empowerment	14
CEDAW Article 13: Right to culture and identity	15
CEDAW Article 14: Access to adequate food, housing, water and sanitation	15
References / Links to media articles	18

Introduction and the preparation process

This Alternative Report specifically addresses the situation of San young women in Namibia. The Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) produced this report in consultation with San community leaders who collected and analysed the stories of San young women in six villages. This report thus focusses on San young women living in rural areas in settlements and villages. This Alternative Report is supported by the Namibia San Council, with which the WLC has a long history of collaboration.

This Alternative Report was created as a result of the long-standing activist work of the Women's Leadership Centre. The Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) initiated the programme: *Speaking for Ourselves: Voices of San Young Women* in 2013. In this programme, the WLC works with San young women living in diverse communities in Namibia. The main goal of the programme is to strengthen and support San young women to challenge marginalisation and exclusion, and to overcome discrimination and poverty. The WLC does this through building their feminist leadership, voice, visibility, cultural pride, human rights knowledge and courage so they can speak for themselves in claiming their rights as women, as indigenous peoples of Namibia, and as equal citizens of Namibia – their country.

This Alternative Report on the Situation of San Young Women in Namibia focuses on the activities in the above mentioned programme: *Speaking for Ourselves: Voices of San Young Women*, carried out by the Women's Leadership Centre during the period 2017-2019 in six San villages in three regions of Namibia. This work included the production of an education and advocacy booklet *CEDAW through San Young Women's Eyes*; CEDAW Consultation Meetings with San young women as well as Dialogues on CEDAW with Regional leaders in three regions of Namibia.

San community leaders were also trained in narrative research to collect stories for this report. This was important because San women and girls constitute a disadvantaged group in Namibia, which is mostly invisible in public/official documents, and storytelling would give them a voice through which to speak to the CEDAW Committee.

The participants of the Research Training Workshop reflected on six years of their work in this programme and identified important themes they wanted to include in this research as well as for the CEDAW report. They developed a research interview guide that was used during small group meetings in participating villages. The San community leaders collected a treasure trove of stories in six San communities that formed the foundation of this alternative report. This work was funded by the Olof Palme International Center (OPC).

This Alternative Report is thus mainly based on the activism work of the WLC, as well as on the experiences and testimonies of San community leaders/activists and the stories they collected from San young women in their communities. We also relied on various sources such as research studies carried out by the Legal Assistance Centre in Namibia and official statistics where available.

The lack of disaggregated data by gender and ethnicity in Namibia makes it almost impossible to correctly assess the real situation of San women and girls and to develop targeted policies and programmes that will improve their lives.

We recommend:

- All socio-economic research conducted in Namibia should provide disaggregated data by gender, ethnicity, language, ability, age, geographical location and other markers which make visible the particular situation of San girls and women, boys and men.

- The disaggregated data should be used to monitor the implementation of all the international agreements and national laws and policies to protect San people’s political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The context and situation of San young women in Namibia

We, the San, the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa, are the most marginalised and socially excluded group of people in Namibia. There are about 30 000 to 40 000 San people in Namibia, less than 2 per cent of the total population. The San peoples include several different ethnic groups with distinct languages and dialects. All these languages have click sounds. The main San groups are the Hai//om, Khwe, Ju/'hoansi, Naro, and #Au//eisi, while smaller San communities include the //anikwe, !Xoo and N/u.

While traditionally, San women belonged to more egalitarian cultures in which women enjoyed greater respect, power autonomy, mobility and greater equality with men, this changed fundamentally through the inward migration of Bantu peoples from other parts of Africa, colonisation, apartheid and militarisation, which had a negative impact on the more egalitarian and complementary roles of San women and men in social, economic and community as well as led to the loss of San traditional lands, resources and livelihoods as nomadic gatherers and hunters.

San girls and women living in Namibia today experience multiple layers of discrimination and oppression on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, indigenous status, class, age and because of the place where we live in Namibia. The situation of San young women in core areas of social life, such as education, employment, and health, is worse than that of young women in other ethnic groups of Namibia.

We recommend:

- Conduct comprehensive participatory research on the situation of San women and girls in all our communities with regard to education, poverty, livelihoods and employment, health and well-being, safety and security, participation in decision making, and involvement in development projects, in order to identify strategies for women’s empowerment in all spheres of our lives.

CEDAW Articles 1-3 and 5: Discrimination, human rights, gender inequality, sex roles and stereotypes

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Gender inequality in San communities

Many men in our communities think that they are superior to women.

We San girls are raised to “respect” men but men are not taught to respect us!

In our homes women are not allowed to make decisions, so whatever decisions men make, the women have to obey to.

Our husbands do not help with housework or with looking after the children.

Control of women's bodies through harmful cultural practices

In some remote villages, girls are still being initiated into womanhood by sitting in a dark room for weeks, even during school time. Their grandmothers instruct them to be submissive and to obey and serve husbands and only do what men want. A man will dance for you when you are released and that man will become your husband even if he is not your choice.

I know a woman who was forced into early marriage by her parents. She wanted to go to school but they wanted the man to take care of them.

We recommend:

- Engage all boys and men, including San boys and men to reflect on male domination and how this violates the rights of girls and women.
- Support San communities to understand how inequalities created through harmful cultural practices such as initiation into womanhood and early marriage put San girls at risk of violence and HIV and Aids.

CEDAW General Recommendation 28: Racial/ethnic inequality and stereotyping of San people

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Racial/ethnic discrimination and stereotyping

Many people of other ethnic groups do not see us as human, and treat us very badly. This makes us believe that we do not belong in Namibia.

We San people are called derogatory names by others such as "kwangala" - which means "those who have nothing", and told that we are lazy and want only to beg and depend on others.

We were ashamed of our cultures because people laugh at and humiliate us because of the clicks in our San languages.

Sexualisation and sexual exploitation of San girls by men of other ethnic groups

There is a belief that San girls are good sex providers. Men from other ethnic groups will specifically target San girls for sex and start relationships with them at an early age, only to abandon them when they become pregnant. The men thereby disown their own children and do not pay maintenance.

If you experience ethnic discrimination you lose your self-esteem and then you just drink all the time, sleep around and do drugs to forget the humiliation.

Lateral violence in San communities

We San people do not respect each other. There is a lot of insulting, blaming, gossiping, putting each other down and fighting in our families and communities.

We recommend:

- Teach San people that they have the right not to be discriminated against, and encourage them to make complaints by informing them where to do so, and which organisations and institutions could assist.
- Teach all people in Namibia to respect the human rights of San people, including San girls and women.
- All government institutions should do research on the racial and ethnic marginalisation of San people, and whether improvements are being made. Institutions should collect regular ethnically disaggregated data, while taking precautions to respect the law on privacy.
- Research and educate San people on the causes and consequences of lateral violence as well as do research on how stories and practices of San cultures can bring about healing.
- Strengthen positive San identities through education to overcome feelings of shame and inferiority through internalised racism and sexism resulting from centuries of dispossession and oppression.

CEDAW Article 3: Legal framework to advance women

Namibia has adopted many international agreements such as CEDAW and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Namibian government has also passed many important national laws and policies that are relevant for San girls and women. The Constitution of Namibia states that nobody must be discriminated against on the basis of being a woman or a man, or on the basis of being from a specific tribe or ethnic group, or on the basis of being poor or rich, or on the basis of where a person lives in Namibia.

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

- **Human rights are on paper but not in the hearts and minds of people**
- **Human rights policies are not implemented effectively to benefit rural women and girls**

While Namibia has good laws on paper, they do not yet protect the rights of all women and girls because they are not implemented in a way that includes all of us. For example, women living in rural areas cannot access the protection orders against violent partners provided for in the Combating of Domestic Violence Act, because the protection orders are issued by magistrate courts which are only in towns. Most people in Namibia do not know and understand these laws; many of our people have not changed their discriminatory attitudes, and do not see women as equal to men. Many also do not see indigenous people as equal to them. This has serious implications on indigenous San girls and women in Namibia.

Lack of human rights knowledge

The work of the Women's Leadership Centre has revealed that the majority of San girls and women have no awareness of our basic human rights and legal rights, and lack the knowledge and skills to access duty bearers to enforce these rights. An enormous gap thus exists between women's rights law on paper and the gender discrimination, racial discrimination and social exclusion in our daily lives.

I never knew all the rights we carry within ourselves. I used to be a coward. I thought there was nothing I could do when people discriminate against me or call me names, I just cried!

There are still so many San people, including San women and girls who do not know their human rights.

We recommend:

- Educate all people to know the full human rights of all Namibian citizens.
- The government must engage in genuine consultation with San women and girls when developing policies and laws that affect our communities and us.
- Finalise, adopt and implement the White Paper on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Namibia.

CEDAW Articles 4, 7 and 11: Temporary special measures, participation in leadership and decision making and employment

Although we San young women are the most marginalised and the poorest of the poor in Namibia, there are no systematic and consistent policies of temporary special measures targeting us. The only exception is in education. Such special measures are urgently needed in leadership and decision making, in employment and many other areas of our lives.

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Absence of San young women in leadership and decision making

In our communities traditional leaders are mostly men.

None of us San women are in the Parliament of Namibia!

We San woman have less freedom to move around and have to ask permission from our husbands and boyfriends when we want to attend meetings in our communities.

The government officials only talk to men when they visit our villages.

We San girls are not encouraged to make our own choices, to think for ourselves! So we become shy and unwilling to talk in meetings.

Poverty and lack of employment in San communities

There are few employment opportunities in our communities, and most of our people are unemployed and poor. As women we have the extra burden of caring for our families while trying to earn a living.

San young women's groups

Before this women's group everyone was for herself. Our problems were too much to bear sitting alone at home, so much heartache and stress! There was no one to talk to. Having other women to talk to breaks the silence. Our problems did not go away but they feel lighter and easier to deal with.

We don't have much time to attend public meetings in our villages because we are doing all the housework and looking after the children.

We recommend

- **An indigenous women's leadership programme:** Strengthen the capacity for leadership development of San young women and support them to participate in politics and public life and to overcome gender, ethnic and social barriers such as illiteracy and limited English skills.
- **Introduce a minimum quota for parliamentary representation for San women:** San women are not at all represented at the various levels of government. We recommend the introduction of a quota of seats allocated specifically to San young women.
- **Create job opportunities for San young women:** We need affirmative action training and employment programmes specifically for San young women.
- **Support San young women's groups with funding and training** and consult and engage us through our women's groups in on-going direct dialogue.
- **Provide unemployment benefits** to vulnerable San youth or provide the basic income grant to every family member in San communities where there are no opportunities for employment. This is also a way to value the unwaged housework that girls and young women do.
- **Increase support services** such as child care to enable women to find suitable work.
- **Enact a comprehensive poverty reduction plan targeting women's poverty**, with special temporary measures, pro-active long term strategies, and targets to eliminate women's poverty, including San young women's poverty in Namibia.
- All government institutions such as traditional authorities, village councils, local and regional councils should uphold the Constitution of Namibia and implement the gender laws, including CEDAW.

CEDAW Articles 4, 6, 16; General Recommendation no 19: Violence, trafficking, child marriage and access to justice

All forms of violence, including domestic violence, rape, and child marriage violate San girls and women's rights to dignity, freedom from torture and degrading treatment, and decrease our personal power and voice to make independent choices for ourselves that are good for us and our communities.

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Domestic violence and rape

There is always domestic violence going on in our communities.

We have lots of problems about violence in our communities. Girls and women are raped by men and even by police. Some are beaten regularly by their boyfriends. This makes us feel helpless and powerless.

Child marriage

In some of our families we still practice child marriage.

Some of us are forced into child marriage by our parents for money. We are not encouraged to go to school but rather to look for someone who can take care of us. But we usually end up having to raise our children without assistance from their fathers.

Exploitative relationships

Poverty and homelessness force many San girls into abusive relationships with sugar daddies.

Protection orders

Women who are living in rural areas have problems accessing protection orders because there are no magistrate courts in our villages.

Shelters

We need shelters for women who are experiencing violence in our communities.

Trafficking of San girls for sexual exploitation and domestic labour

We have heard of cases where San parents, families and people from other ethnic groups are trafficking San girls for sexual and domestic labour.

Other tribes are coming to our houses and take our girls, saying they want to support them with education, as we San parents cannot afford to send them to school. But instead they use the girls to look after their children. This is child labour and a form of trafficking.

Access to justice

The legal system is often a crucial part of women's and girls' journey out of violence. We are concerned that this is not being adequately prioritised and translated into practice in San communities.

When we have a problem and we go to the police to give them a report they will just pretend like they are writing the report and when you come back to ask about the case they don't know who wrote the report but you know who was writing it. They don't take us seriously. It's like what we say does not matter to them and that is why we don't feel protected in our community, because our duty bearers are not protecting us but deny us access to justice. It's like we don't have the right to be protected like other ethnic groups.

We recommend

- Educate our communities on laws against violence and where to seek help.
- Devote special attention to education and protection of girls living in villages.
- Allow and train traditional leaders to issue and supervise protection orders.
- Provide training and funding to San young women's groups that are supporting girls and women who are survivors of violence, and assist them to set up community-based shelters.
- Educate parents, teachers and communities on the consequences of child marriage.
- Educate San communities on different forms of trafficking
- Promote and build trust between San communities and the local police.
- Provide enough funding for legal aid for San girls and women.
- Protect San children from child labour, trafficking and exploitation.
- Promote the strengthening of the justice system through effective culturally sensitive human rights/women's rights education for the police.

CEDAW Article 9: Nationality

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Lack of birth certificate, IDs and translation services

Many of our children don't have birth certificates. Sometimes women have children with men from other tribes, and the men will go away and then we are unable to find those men to register our children in order to get birth certificates. Time and again we are sent away to look for the fathers of our children and that is why some children don't go to school because they don't have documents.

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.

We still experience stigma, discrimination and exclusion by non-San staff of state agencies and service providers when we speak our languages, ask for translation services, lack birth certificates and IDs to access the Old Age Pension and other state grants

We recommend:

- Remove the requirement that fathers must accompany the mothers to register their children in order to obtain the birth certificates.
- The state must actively promote respect, equality and non-discrimination between people of different races and ethnic groups in our communities.
- The State must provide translation services for members of San communities.

CEDAW Article 10: Equal rights in education

Although the Namibian government has taken certain affirmative action measures regarding the education of San children such as exemption from school fees, the discrimination of San children continues in schools.

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Culture and mother-tongue education

Our schools do not welcome and accommodate the knowledge, experiences and needs of San children.

Few San children receive mother-tongue education, and in some schools San children are not even allowed to speak their home language on the school grounds. For example, in Kavango East Region the medium of instruction for San children is Rukwangali and not Kwedam, their mother-tongue.

School textbooks do not say much about the San people, San cultures and about San history, and some include negative stereotypes about San people, which impacts the self-esteem of San children.

Access to pre-primary education

Many San children do not have access to pre-primary education.

Violence, bullying and discrimination against San learners

Our children experience discrimination and bullying by other children and even by some teachers because they are San.

Violence in schools/hostels

Corporal punishment has allowed teachers to seriously assault our children. Our children are traumatised by the violence and bullying and most drop out of school without completing primary school.

Dropping out of school

Secondary schools are far away from most San villages. Many San parents cannot afford the transport and hostel costs, so very few San children gain access to secondary, let alone tertiary education.

Many San girls drop out of school because of teenage pregnancy and are not allowed to return to school after giving birth, despite the policy on learner pregnancy. Sometimes the girls are asked to move to other schools. Some teachers have sexual affairs with schoolgirls.

Many San learners dropped out of school during the Covid 19 lockdowns in Namibia.

Lack of respect for San parents

Many schools have no respect and are not welcoming to San parents. In some schools during parents meetings there are no translations, while some teachers insult parents, calling them dirty and stupid.

Low literacy of San parents

Literacy rates of women and men in San villages are substantially below the national average. Low literacy levels among San women are associated with numerous consequences, including lower school attendance of their children, low usage of contraception, economic dependence on husbands, higher tendency towards early marriage of their children, etc.

Access to tertiary education

San students who are studying in Windhoek are suffering because the Division Marginalised Communities in the Office of the President failed numerous times to pay their food and accommodation allowances on time. Further, some San tertiary students could not sit their exams because the government failed to pay their exam fees on time.

Recommendations

- Provide high quality pre-school education to all San children.
- Provide quality mother-tongue education in early childhood development centres, pre-primary and primary schools, with adequate training for staff so that San children can catch up with their peers.

- Eliminate corporal punishment from all schools.
- Provide training on trauma-informed education to teachers so they can support San children to heal and thrive.
- Provide education curricula that follow the needs of San children and youth.
- Provide teaching staff specially trained to work with San children.
- Systematically motivate the San children to attend school and complete their education.
- Motivate San parents to support their children's education.
- Create safe classrooms where San students feel culturally safe and without any fear of rejection, but feel encouraged and respected.
- Train and employ San support/assistant teachers to provide extra support for San children as well as for teachers in building sound relationships with students and parents.
- Provide vocational education in San villages and promote broader subject choices for San students.
- Create healthy and safe hostels where San girls and boys can thrive and are protected from all forms of violence.
- Prevent teenage pregnancy, dating violence and negative peer pressure by educating and mentoring pre-teen girls and boys on puberty, respectful and healthy relationships as well as on resilience, the ability to overcome difficulties and thrive.
- Build respectful and trusting relationships with San communities by recognising the key role of San parents in their children's education.
- Provide quality literacy as well as better parenting programmes to parents and caregivers of San children.
- Include San community members in the school boards. Train, support and respect the school boards.
- Make special provisions for San children that will ensure that they return to school after the Covid 19 lockdowns.
- An adequate government subsidies for those who pass Grade 10 to complete senior secondary and tertiary education. Community programmes must be supported and funded to assist young mothers to stay at school. Timely information on grants and scholarships must be available to us all.

CEDAW Article 12: Health care and family planning

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

Discrimination in health services

The nurse at the clinic will help other people before us San people, even though we were the first to come to the clinic.

Dying from preventable diseases

We San people are dying earlier than other Namibians from preventable diseases such as TB, malaria, HIV/Aids, diabetes, cervical cancer and breast cancer.

Lack of family planning services

We San young women have many babies at much younger ages than other Namibian young women. Many of us do not use contraceptives. We need family planning education for young girls and boys.

In some villages there are no clinics and young women lack access to contraceptives and become pregnant.

Mother and child mortality

Many San pregnant women do not have access to pre-natal care, and do not have assistance by trained nurses at childbirth. This leads to many mothers and babies dying during childbirth.

Cannot afford ambulance services

At the clinic in our village, people have to pay a small fee for consultations. Many poor people cannot afford this and go without treatment. Also, ambulances do not come to our villages because we are not able to pay the drivers.

Lack of privacy

Our clinic has only one room – there is no privacy and people have to be attended to on the waiting benches outside. We do not receive good care.

Lack of translation services

Even in places where we have clinics, the nurses don't speak our languages and treat us like garbage instead of respecting us.

Lack of medication

Our clinics regularly run out of medication, equipment, and medical supplies. They only give us panado for any kind of problem.

The mobile clinic only comes once a month to our village; they never have enough medication, especially ARVs and TB medication.

Access to specialist services

We need more than just a clinic. We need health centres that offer all kinds of services such as dental services.

We recommend

- Provide access for San people to health services that are effective, high quality, appropriate and affordable, as well as culturally respectful and free from racism and inequality. Provide translation services and maintain patient privacy.
- Prevent infant and maternal mortality by ensuring that expectant mothers and babies get the best possible care and support for a good start to life.

- Promote health care in the early years, including good nutrition, immunisation and addressing threats such as foetal alcohol syndrome and tobacco smoke to ensure the health of San children.
- Provide rehabilitation and counselling services in San villages that work with mentally ill people, people addicted to alcohol and drugs, and survivors of violence.
- Support San people to prevent diseases related to smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, alcohol and drug abuse and low intake of vegetables and fruit.
- Train San young women to serve our communities in the field of social and emotional well-being to help prevent mental illness. Ensure sufficient funding for mental health support services.
- The government must investigate hospitals that privatise ambulances and make sure that they are available to the people at all times.
- Provide safe and free abortion services to all women and girls in Namibia
- Organise awareness raising programmes for San women and girls on reproductive health issues and family planning.
- Organise preventive health check-ups for San women and girls at a community level at least once a year.
- Raise awareness amongst rural women of their rights to health.

CEDAW Article 13: Economic empowerment

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young

Absence of economic empowerment in San communities

There are no businesses in our villages where we can find employment.

There are no financial institutions where we can get help if we want to start our own businesses because who will borrow money to an unemployed young San woman?

We have no jobs; our grandmothers' old age pensions are the only income for many San families.

We recommend:

- Create a Village Investment Fund that San young women can source funds to create a livelihoods projects for themselves and employ other young women.
- Create centres for indigenous healing, sustainable livelihoods and creative industries in the places where San girls and women live.
- Provide training that recognises the traditional knowledge, skills and strength of San girls and women. Involve us in the identification of our needs, as well as in the design and delivery of the services.
- Promote San women's access to land, livestock, credit, technical and business training, and appropriate technology, and ensure women's representation on village councils and land boards.
- Encourage entrepreneurship among rural women, easier access to credits and tax incentives.

CEDAW Article 13: Right to culture and identity

Key issues and concerns: Voices of San young women

For far too long we have been ashamed of who we are, of our ethnic identity. This make us struggle to accept ourselves as indigenous peoples, and to claim our rightful place in our society.

It is important to be recognised for who we are and our place in the history of humanity as the first peoples of this world. This strengthens our spirit and gives us the inner power to be proud of ourselves.

Our culture is important – we have to pass it on the new generations. We have to strengthen the good in our cultures and make it our livelihood. Let's honour our elders and listen to their teachings and guidance. Our elders are our libraries!

We can heal ourselves and become whole once again through our cultural dances, stories and songs!

We recommend:

- Recognise and value the cultures of San peoples. Support San people to reclaim their cultures through cultural festivals and livelihoods based on cultural knowledge and skills.
- Document the San languages that are on the brink of extinction. Strengthen San young people's identity and pride by teaching San languages as well as introducing San cultural knowledge in school and university.
- Build a pool of indigenous researchers by becoming co-researchers with those who want to study the San Cultures.
- Support San young women to document San cultural songs, dances, poems and stories and to publish our own books.
- Support San girls and women's cultural groups.

CEDAW Article 14: Access to adequate food, housing, water and sanitation

Key issues and concerns on adequate food: Voices of San young women

Most of us San people lost our land. We cannot gather or hunt in the bush like we used to. Today others say that we are lazy after they have taken away our land, our only source of livelihood.

Our children are malnourished and stunted. The food aid we get is not enough and it is not nutritious. Sometimes we even receive rotten or modified maize meal and expired canned food that make people sick. We need vegetables and meat.

Some of the people who distribute food aid in our communities are abusive – they push elders and pregnant women around.

To receive food aid they test whether you can speak a San language, have a San surname, and comment on the colour of your skin. If you have a black skin because your father was Owambo, you will not get the food!

Young women who do not have their own homes and children are not allowed to receive food. It is no wonder that young women are becoming pregnant at such a high rate.

We recommend

- Train the food aid distributors to treat all people with dignity and respect. Help the elderly and pregnant women first to prevent them for standing for hours in the hot sun.
- Provide people with nutritious food such as fruit, vegetables and meat, and ensure that expired food is not distributed. This is also very important for the meals children receive at school.
- Provide agricultural land and training to San girls and women so we can grow our own food, feed our families, and generate an income for ourselves.
- Give food aid to young women who are not in school to prevent sexual exploitation as well as forced and child marriage.
- Provide San families with the money to buy our own food according to our needs and wants.

Key issues and concerns on adequate housing: Voices of San young women

San young women and children live in houses made from blankets, plastic and zinc. Our houses blow away in strong winds and are washed away by heavy rains.

You might stay on in abusive relationship if you do not have your own house because you need a place to sleep and raise your children.

San young women live in overcrowded houses where our children are exposed to adult sexual life and adult problems because of the lack of privacy. This puts our children at risk of sexual abuse.

San young women are homeless and are being forced into early relationships and early pregnancy.

We need electricity in our homes.

A woman does not inherit her husband's belongings in these communities. After the death of a man the property just returns to his family. Some men leave wills behind but we have not heard of any such things happening in this village.

We recommend:

- Provide adequate and affordable housing and electricity for San communities.
- We need protection from landlords and farm owners who discriminate against us and chase us away after the death of the employed family member.
- Government provide training and materials so we can build strong houses for ourselves according to our own designs.

Key issues and concerns on access to water: Voices of San young women

In our village our water is contaminated by sewage. We pay for dirty water. We are constantly sick, and our babies die because of contaminated water.

In our village we stand in line for hours to collect water and the water often runs out. Or we carry water long distances from boreholes.

We get water at the clinic at our village, but only for two hours in the morning and one hour in the evening. We pay an employee of the clinic for this water.

The government installed diesel water pumps and when the diesel runs out people go without water for months. If the pump breaks it can take years to repair it because nobody has money to fix pumps!

In some places Namwater installs a tap head for a lot of money and you also have to buy a pipe and do the installation yourself. Where will this money come from if the whole village is unemployed?

If water pipes burst we must pay for the wasted water.

Boreholes are not maintained or cleaned. We share the same water with cattle.

We recommend:

- Ensure that all people have access to safe and sufficient water.
- Investigate people who privatise public water sources.
- Give education on how to save and use water properly, and how to purify our drinking water.
- Build better water sources and bigger water tanks to store and distribute water for San families and for our animals.
- Provide land and make irrigation systems available for our crops and make medicines available for water-related illnesses.
- Maintain boreholes and fix water pumps quickly.

Key issues and concerns on access to sanitation: Voices of San young women

Women who just gave birth use buckets because they cannot make it to the bush. It is very unsanitary and dangerous to everyone's health including the new baby.

Sometimes people's human waste ends up on the street, in yards, lying around in the public. This situation is dangerous for all people in our village and disease is everywhere due to a lack of toilets in our villages.

When we demand access to sanitation, some councillors will say in a derogatory way: "Did your ancestors use flush toilets? Just use the bush!"

Drum toilets are hard to empty and clean. The drums are too heavy to dispose of the waste and the municipality refuses to do it.

Hepatitis E will soon become a reality in our communities.

We recommend:

- Train and support San young women with resources to build our own toilets and restore our dignity.

References

For further information see the two publications by the Women's Leadership Centre produced in collaboration with San young women:

CEDAW through San Young Women's Eyes

http://www.wlc-namibia.org/images/downloads/CEDAW_through_San_Young_Womens_Eyes_-_WLC.pdf

Speaking for ourselves. Voices of San young women in Namibia

http://www.wlc-namibia.org/images/downloads/Speaking_for_ourselves_-_Voices_of_San_young_women_in_Namibia_-_WLC.pdf

Links to media articles reporting on the voices and demands of San young women in Namibia:

Sick San call for help Namibian sun 13/10/20

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/sick-san-call-for-help2020-10-13>

San poverty fuels spread of skin disease Namibian Sun 19/10/20

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/san-poverty-fuels-spread-of-skin-disease2020-10-19>

Over 600 battle skin disease in Kavango Neweralive.na

<https://neweralive.na/posts/over-600-battle-skin-disease-in-kavango>

Drimiopsis demonstration against myriad issues. Windhoek Express 04/09/2020

<https://www.we.com.na/news/drimiopsis-demonstration-against-myriad-issues2020-09-04/>

Namibia's shame Namibian Sun 23-Aug-18

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/namibias-shame2018-08-22>

San women stand up Namibian Sun 19-Jul-18

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/san-women-stand-up2018-07-18>

Appeal to end discrimination against San women New Era 18-Jul-18

<https://neweralive.na/en/posts/appeal-to-end-discrimination-against-san-women>

Govt project sparks San eviction fear Namibian Sun 18-Jul-18

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/govt-project-sparks-san-eviction-fears2018-07-17>

San women take a stand for rights and dignity The Namibian 17-Jul-18

<https://www.namibian.com.na/69499/read/San-women-take-a-stand-for-rights-and-dignity>

San Women stand up Namibian Sun 20-Jun-17

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/san-women-stand-up>

No justice Equality for San Namibian Sun 12-Jun-17

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/no-justice-equality-for-san>

San learners attend classes standing New Era 29-May-15

<https://neweralive.na/en/posts/san-learners-attend-classes-standing>

Slow demise of the worlds oldest tribe Namibian Sun 15-Sep-15

<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/slow-demise-of-the-worlds-oldest-tribe>

Slaves in our own country Namibia Economist 24-Sep-15

<https://economist.com.na/13073/headlines/slaves-in-our-own-country/>

San abuse: A taint on the Namibian conscience Namibian Sun 16-Sep-15
<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/san-abuse-a-taint-on-the-namibian-conscience/>

Equality court needed Namibian Sun 17-Sep-15
<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/equality-court-needed>

Kapofi Slams Daylight Robbery of the San people Namibian Sun 25/08/2015
<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/kapofi-slams-daylight-robbery-of-san-people>

San group claims discrimination by Zambezi governor Namibian Sun 02-Jul-14
<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/san-group-claims-discrimination-by-zambezi-governor>

San women plead for tribal equality Namibian Sun 30-Jun-14
<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/san-women-plead-for-tribal-equality>

Uncertain future for Omega 1 The Namibian 09-May-14
<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=123021&page=archive-read>

Khwe women talk of social, economic exclusion in Namibia The Namibian 16-Nov-12
<https://www.namibian.com.na/102501/archive-read/Khwe-women-talk-of-social-economic-exclusion-in-Namibia>