

ZIMBABWE

The Zimbabwe government does not recognize any specific groups as indigenous to the country, maintaining instead that all citizens of the country are indigenous.

Two peoples who self-identify as indigenous in Zimbabwe are: 1) the Tshwa (Tyua, Cuaa) San, who are found in the Tsholotsho District of Matabeleland North Province and the Bulalima-Mangwe District of Matabeleland South Province in western Zimbabwe, and 2) the Doma (Wadoma, Vadema) of Chapoto Ward in Guruve District and Mbire District of Mashonaland Central Province and Karoi District of Mashonaland West Province in the Zambezi Valley of northern Zimbabwe. There are approximately 2,500 Tshwa and 1,000 Doma in Zimbabwe, making up 0.3% of the country's population.

The Tshwa of western Zimbabwe, who are sometimes referred to as the Amasili or Abathwa, are divided into a number of different named groups, including the Xaise, Ganade, Cirecire, Jitswa and Kaitsum.¹ The Doma are also sub-divided into what they term 'clans', each of which has a name, history and, in some cases, totems.

The Tshwa and Doma have a history of foraging and continue to rely to a limited extent on wild plant, animal and insect resources. Most Tshwa and Doma households tend to have diversified economies, often working for members of other groups. Many of the Tshwa and Doma live below the poverty line in Zimbabwe and together make up some of the poorest people in the country.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As with other African nations (with the exception of the CAR) Zimbabwe has not adopted the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 of 1989* of the International Labour Organization (ILO), although it may reconsider its position in coming years.

There are no specific laws on indigenous peoples' rights in the country nor is the concept of indigenous peoples included in the Zimbabwe Constitution.

A new Constitution

A revised Constitution was adopted in Zimbabwe in March 2013, which contains sections relevant to indigenous peoples. In particular, the Constitution identifies “Koisan” as one of the 16 recognized languages of Zimbabwe (“Khoisan” refers to a wider language group, including languages spoken by the San and Khoekhoe, among others). The wording of the Constitution promotes the equitable treatment, development and use of the 16 official languages in Zimbabwe.

Discussions with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education last year² underscored the fact that the Ministry expects to produce basic school materials in the San language, Tshwao. It remains to be seen whether the Zimbabwe government has the resources and capacity to develop an orthography of Tshwao, along with culturally appropriate educational and language materials. Given the volume of work required, a timeframe of 5 to 10 years should be expected if Tshwao development is taken forward.

Other sub-sections within the new Constitution of relevance to indigenous peoples include promoting actions to empower “all marginalised persons, groups and communities in Zimbabwe” and the protection of “indigenous knowledge systems, including knowledge of the medicinal and other properties of animal and plant life”. Furthermore, the Constitution addresses the elimination of discrimination and promotes investment and basic service provision to marginalized groups and areas.

The level of effective implementation of the new Constitution remains to be seen, alongside that of previously signed international declarations and conventions, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (UNDM). The ongoing establishment of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, enshrined in the new Constitution, and new programmes under the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs seek to implement previously ratified conventions, as recommended by the 2011 Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council.



Livelihoods and pressing issues

Like other people in Zimbabwe, the Tshwa and Doma were affected by the hyperinflation and economic stagnation that prevailed in the first decade of the new millennium. However, a tentative return to growth since 2009 had fostered relative improvements by 2013. Nevertheless, both Tshwa and Doma people continue to face a number of pressing issues, including high rates of unemployment, food insecurity, poverty, limited access to clean water, sanitation and health problems, low to moderate access to social services such as education and health facilities, insecurity of land tenure, and losses of cultural identity and language. A number of Tshwa and Doma people and organizations working with them maintain that they are marginalized and suffer from discrimination. Some of the problems people face stem from physical isolation and a lack of access to external support. A few Tshwa and Doma have joined other Zimbabweans in neighbouring countries in order to seek jobs.³

Some of the Tshwa in Tsholotsho and Bulalima-Mangwe districts worked in 2013 for Ndebele and Kalanga as field hands, herders and domestic workers.

They assisted them in collecting water, firewood, poles and termite earth, constructing homes, building fences, ploughing fields and harvesting crops. There were also a few Tshwa and Doma working in the mines of South Africa and Zimbabwe in 2013, and Tshwa were hopeful about their employment possibilities in a newly discovered diamond area in Doge, Tsholotsho.

In the past, in North and South Matabeleland and in Mashonaland West Provinces, Tshwa and Doma communities have taken part in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), which was initiated in the 1980s. Over time, there have been changes in CAMPFIRE, and the benefits going directly to local communities have been reduced, with district councils taking up to 85 per cent of the funds deriving from community-based natural resource management activities. The numbers of jobs in CAMPFIRE programmes had declined to the point where, in 2013, fewer than 20 Tshwa and Doma people were employed. Similar trends were seen among those Tshwa and Doma working for the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority (ZNPWA) and in national parks, reserves and monuments in the country.

Imprisonments and relocation

In September 2013, it was announced that 103 elephants and other animals had been killed by cyanide placed at water holes and salt licks in the southern part of Hwange National Park. Subsequently, over two dozen people, some of whom were Tshwa, were arrested for alleged involvement in the poisonings and for possession of elephant tusks. Two of the alleged poachers received sentences of 15 and a half years for violations of Zimbabwe's wildlife laws. Prosecutions have not yet been brought against a number alleged middlemen and funders of the ivory poaching, while others have been acquitted.⁴ At least a dozen households that lived close to the southern border of Hwange, including some Tshwa, were told that they had to relocate to places some distance away from the park and were in the process of doing so at the end of 2013, although they have not been notified of any detailed resettlement plans or assistance, which has caused substantial concern.

Political and social participation

Government ministries in Zimbabwe sought to expand their work with Tshwa and Doma and other minorities in 2013. These ministries included the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Unlike Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, Zimbabwe does not have a unit or programme devoted specifically to minority affairs. The government espouses what it terms "indigenisation" which means, in effect, localization, empowerment and expansion of economic opportunities for all Zimbabwean groups considered disadvantaged before independence, in line with the *Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act* (IEEA).

While it has been argued that Tshwa and Doma face difficulties in gaining access to positions of authority, there are at least a dozen or more Tshwa and Doma village heads and chiefs, including some women. These local authorities are consulted by government officials, district councillors and educational institutions and by non-government organizations. Local Tshwa and Doma authorities play significant roles in decision-making at the local level; they serve as intermediaries with the state, they mediate disputes and they assist in land-use and development planning. The Tshwa have their own organization but the Doma do not.

Media visibility

Various media reports on Zimbabwe's San communities appeared throughout 2013 as a result of improved community representation and media contacts, including reports by a San CBO, Tsoro-o-tso San Development Trust. These included coverage on access to water, food and livelihoods, land rights and issues pertaining to language and the new Constitution. Notably, President Mugabe mentioned San development issues during a visit to Tsholotsho in May 2013.

Indigenous language, culture and identity issues

A common but mistaken perception of San peoples in Zimbabwe in 2013 was that they do not wish to participate in education and that they “resist civilization”.⁵ In fact, a substantial proportion of Tshwa and Doma children are in school. In many cases, Tshwa and Doma adults state that they want their children to be educated; however, one of the problems that many of them have is a lack of cash to pay school fees.

In Tsholotsho, the Tsoro-o-tso San Trust held cultural festivals for Tshwa in 2013, including one at Gariya on 17 August. Tshwa communities also established an Early Childhood Development Centre at Gariya in December 2013. The Tsoro-o-tso San Development Trust and a related San CBO, the Creative Arts and Educational Development Association, collaborated with local communities and with staff from the University of Zimbabwe in investigating the Tshwao language. They held workshops and meetings with Tshwa communities as part of a major effort to promote Tshwa cultural and language revitalization.⁶

The Doma, like the Tshwa, are also seeking to promote their social, economic and cultural rights and enhance their well-being. Both the Tshwa and the Doma hope to participate in meetings on indigenous peoples and minorities in the future and to work alongside other groups in Zimbabwe to facilitate equity, social justice and human rights in the country. ○

Notes and references

- 1 Data obtained through fieldwork in 2013; See also Davy Ndlovu (2013a) *In Their Own Words: A Contemporary History of the Lost and Forgotten San People in Zimbabwe*. Dlamini, Zimbabwe: Creative Arts and Educational Development Association; Davy Ndlovu (2013b) *Tshwao Language Development and Revitalization Programme: Concept Note*. Dlamini, Zimbabwe: Creative Arts and Educational Development Association.
- 2 Meetings with Ministry officials at the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Harare and private communications between senior ministry staff with Robert Hitchcock and Ben Begbie-Clench in March-April and November-December 2013.
- 3 For a discussion of the situation in Zimbabwe and its effects in terms of movements of people to neighbouring countries, see Bill Derman and Randi Kaarhus, eds. (2013) *In the Shadow of a Conflict: Crisis in Zimbabwe and Its Effects in Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia*. Harare: Weaver Press.

- 4 Radio Netherlands Worldwide (2013) Zimbabwe: Clampdown on Elephant Poaching Threatens San. Amsterdam: Radio Netherlands Worldwide, 3 December 2013
- 5 See Nqobile Bhebhe (2013) San People Resist Civilisation: Mugabe. *Newsday*, Tuesday, 14 May 2013.
- 6 Divine Dube (2013) A New Era for the Khoisan in Zimbabwe. *Newsday*, 16 August 2013.

Ben Begbie-Clench is a consultant working on San issues and former director of the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), benbegbie@gmail.com

Ashton Murirwa is a lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Zimbabwe, murirwashie@gmail.com

Davy Ndlovu is Head of the Creative Arts and Educational Development Association, davyndlovu@yahoo.com

Robert K. Hitchcock is a member of the Board of the Kalahari Peoples Fund (KPF), a non-profit organization devoted to assisting people in southern Africa, rkhitchcock@gmail.com