

## ZIMBABWE

While the Government of Zimbabwe does not recognise any specific groups as indigenous to the country, two peoples self-identify as indigenous: the Tshwa (Tyua, Cuaa) San found in western Zimbabwe, and the Doma (Vadema) of north-central Zimbabwe. Population estimates indicate there are 2,600 Tshwa and 1,050 Doma in Zimbabwe, approximately 0.03% of the country's population.

The Tshwa and Doma have histories of foraging and continue to rely to a limited extent on wild plants, animals and insect resources. Most households tend to have diversified economies, often working for members of other groups. Many Tshwa and Doma live below the official poverty line and together make up some of the poorest people in the country. While available socio-economic data on Tshwa communities has increased (baseline data collected in 2013), up-to-date information on the Doma is very limited. Often referred to by the derogatory term of "Ostrich People" due to the relatively high incidence of ectrodactyl foot malformation within their population, reports suggest the Doma face similar discrimination, food insecurity and lack of access to social services as the San.<sup>1</sup>

Zimbabwe has no specific laws on indigenous peoples' rights. However the "Koisian" language is included in the Constitution as one of 16 official languages, and there is some recognition within government of the need for more information and improved approaches to minorities. Realisation of core human rights in Zimbabwe continues to be challenging. Zimbabwe is a signatory to the CERD, CRC, CEDAW, ICCPR and ICE-SCR; reporting on these conventions is largely overdue but there have been recent efforts to meet requirements. In recent years, Zimbabwe has also participated in the United Nation's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Zimbabwe voted in favour of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) but, as with other African states, with the exception of the Central African Republic, Zimbabwe has not adopted ILO Convention No. 169.

## Recognition, policy and programmes

The terms “indigenous”, “indigeneity” and “indigenisation” are widely utilised by the Government of Zimbabwe when referring to Zimbabweans who were considered disadvantaged before independence in April 1980. The San and Doma are not identified as indigenous peoples as such but are referred to as part of the category of “marginalised persons, groups and communities” in government documents. Awareness of minority groups in Zimbabwe has grown in previous years, although political and economic barriers persist as key factors in limiting effective engagement. None of the 2014 UPR mid-term reports therefore mentioned the issues facing San or Doma, or other minorities specifically, other than to say that access to justice has been improved through the provision of a new court house in Tsholotsho.<sup>2</sup>

In late 2013, a study was carried out on by Ben Begbie-Clench, Robert Hitchcock and Ashton Murwira on the San in Tsholotsho District, Matabeleland North Province, and this report was circulated to the Zimbabwe government in 2014. Support for this work was provided by the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.<sup>3</sup> Responses were obtained from several ministries, which are in the process of following up on recommendations made. The finalised report, funded by IWGIA and OSISA (Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa), will be available in early 2015.

While the concept of indigenous peoples is not included in the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013, some sections relate to indigenous and minority groups. The government carried out limited work in 2014 on the protection and promotion of “indigenous knowledge systems, including knowledge of the medicinal and other properties of animal and plant life”, as described in the revised Zimbabwean Constitution.

The government also continues to maintain that it will promote the teaching of the “Koisian” language as one of the 16 official languages, as stipulated in the Constitution.<sup>4</sup> Planning for increased provision of educational materials in mother tongues was carried out with support from UNICEF and other donors, although an orthography has yet to be developed for Tshwao. Efforts to implement the teaching and recording of the critically endangered Tshwao language have been made



almost solely by local NGOs and community associations, supported by University of Zimbabwe linguists.<sup>5</sup>

### **Livelihoods and food security**

The extreme poverty of the San persisted throughout 2014,<sup>6</sup> and was exacerbated by severe flooding in January and February in Tsholotsho District, where the majority of the Tshwa San reside. The flooding, which occurred after heavy rain caused the Gariya Dam to overflow and the Gwayi and Zumbani rivers to burst their banks, destroyed houses and crops, displacing over 400 families in the area. The allegedly delayed and limited response by the Zimbabwe government was criticized heavily, and media reports indicated that some families were still living in tents in October. Also in October, the international NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), announced the handover of its 14-year HIV/AIDS programme in Tsholotsho District to the Ministry of Health. MSF had provided a range of critical support and specific programmes for the Tshwa over the preceding years.

Unconfirmed media reports in July highlighted apparently severe food insecurity among San in Tsholotsho District. The Tshwa have a marked reliance on food relief, provided in the majority by NGOs, with substantial additional sources from small scale-agriculture, wild plants and insects. However, the provision of tools and advice for local agriculture has remained limited for the San in Tsholotsho and this, coupled with unreliable deliveries of food relief and limited access to natural resources, has contributed to low levels of food security.

Government and NGO projects in Tsholotsho District, including CAMPFIRE (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources), have had some albeit relatively minor effects on income levels in a few remote communities.<sup>7</sup>

## **Resettlement and judicial issues**

An unknown number of San, Ndebele and Kalanga households were moved away from the southern boundary of Hwange National Park in September 2013, in response to issues of cyanide-related deaths of elephants and other animals in southern Hwange and areas to the south of the park (see *The Indigenous World 2014*).

In November 2014, some 22 people were arrested, tried and jailed for involvement in the 2013 cyanide poisoning, at least two of whom were San.<sup>8</sup> One Tshwa San received a US\$200,000 fine and a 16-year prison sentence with labour, as compared to lighter jail sentences, fines and acquittals for members of other groups. There are indications of a high level of involvement on the part of government officials in the alleged poaching rings, which were involved in the killing of elephants, rhinoceros and other high value animals in Zimbabwe in 2014.<sup>9</sup> The Minister of Environment, Water and Climate made a statement in the National Assembly on 27 August 2014 stating that anti-poaching operations had been stepped up in and around Hwange National Park.<sup>10</sup>

## **Limited impact of government programmes and policies**

The Zimbabwe government espouses what it terms “indigenisation”, which means, in effect, localization, empowerment and expansion of economic opportu-

nities for all Zimbabwean groups considered disadvantaged before independence, in line with the *Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act* (IEEA). The government's indigenisation policy is aimed in part at expanding employment and income-generating opportunities for youth and marginalised groups. However, this policy has had relatively little impact in Tsholotsho District or in the Zambezi Valley where the Doma reside,<sup>11</sup> both groups with high unemployment and low income levels. The Fast Track Land Reform process in Zimbabwe, which was touted by the government as enhancing access to land by marginalised groups, had few direct impacts on the Tshwa and Doma in 2014.

### **Indigenous language, culture and identity issues**

Tshwao is part of the Eastern Kalahari Khoe group of languages, and is relatively little spoken. In August, Tshwao language activist, Banini Moyo, passed away, further reducing the small number of Zimbabwean San who speak the Tshwao language fluently. Some work has been done to promote the Tshwao language by the Creative Arts and Educational Development Association (CAEDA), including through International Mother Language Day in Dlamini, Tsholotsho on 21 February<sup>12</sup> in which the Tshwa San participated.

### **Meetings on indigenous issues**

A regional San planning meeting was held in Bulawayo from 25-27 June 2014, including representatives from the Tshwa community, and organised by the Southern African Development Community and several NGOs. A Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA)/Southern African Development Community Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO) discussion of indigenous issues also took place in Bulawayo in June 2014.

There were issues raised about San and other indigenous groups' human rights at a Southern African Development Community (SADC) side event in Harare on 28 July 2014, attended by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and other non-government organisations, including the Tsoro-o-tso San Development Trust.

Visits were paid to western Zimbabwe by OSISA in September-October 2014 in which discussions were held regarding assistance for the Tsoro-o-tso San Development Trust and San community development and empowerment activities.

In July 2014, a representative of the Tshwa community, Christopher Dube, attended the launch of “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Manual for National Human Rights Institutions” in Cape Town, South Africa. This meeting and its follow-ups had an impact on the Tsholotsho San in that connections with international-level activities on human rights were strengthened. No San or Zimbabwe government representatives took part in May’s 13th United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) meeting in New York.

## Relevance of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

There were a number of issues discussed at the WCIP in New York in September which were relevant to Zimbabwe, including civil and political rights, the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), land rights, the right to development, the right to health, cultural rights including the right to learn and speak mother tongue languages, and the right to education. Neither Zimbabwe nor any Zimbabwean indigenous representatives took part in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, although there were discussions sponsored by NGOs at the local level in western Zimbabwe on some of the issues raised at the conference, including issues associated with development, land and resource access, and intellectual property rights. ○

## Notes and references

- 1 <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2014/06/21/relief-doma-people/>
- 2 <http://www.hrforumzim.org/news/zim-civil-society-organisations-mid-term-report-of-the-universal-periodic-review-process/>
- 3 **Hitchcock, Robert K., Ben Begbie-Clench, and Ashton Murwira, 2014a:** *The San of Zimbabwe: An Assessment Report*. Report to the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ), the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA), and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA).
- 4 This effort has been called “half-hearted”; see **Maseko, Busani and Noziziwe Dhamini, 2014:** Mother Tongue Language Instruction for Lower Primary School Level in Zimbabwe: A Half-hearted Commitment to the Development of her Indigenous Languages, *Journal of Education and Practice* 5(6):59-65.

- 5 Tshwao language cultural and language days were held several times in 2014 by the Tsoto-o-tso San Development Trust and the Creative Arts and Educational Development Association in Tsholotsho and Bulalima-Mangwe districts.
- 6 See **Zhou, Mangarai, 2014**: The Persistence of Extreme Poverty among Ethnic Minorities in Zimbabwe: A Case of the San Community in Tsholotsho District, Matabeleland North. BA Dissertation, Development Studies, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe and **Hitchcock, Robert K., Ben Begbie-Clench, and Ashton Murwira, 2014**: Indigenous Space, "Indigenisation", and Social Boundaries among the Tshwa San of Western Zimbabwe. Paper presented at the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth (ASA) Conference No. 14, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 19 - 22 June 2014.
- 7 There were reports by community leaders that CAMPFIRE programmes did not distribute benefits widely to communities in western Tsholotsho in 2014.
- 8 **Mabuko, N., V. Muphoshi, T. Tarakini, E. Gandiwa, S. Vengesayi, and E. Makuwe, 2014**: Cyanide Poisoning and African Elephant Mortality in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe, A Preliminary Assessment. *Pachyderm* 55:92-94; **Gogo, Jeffrey, 2014**: Anti-Poaching Efforts under Pressure from Corruption. *The Herald*, 10 November 2014.
- 9 **Gogo, Jeffrey, 2014**: Anti-Poaching Efforts under Pressure from Corruption. *The Herald*, 10 November 2014.
- 10 Statement by Minister Kasukuwere, Minister of Environment, Water, and Climate in the Parliament of Zimbabwe, 27 August 2014.
- 11 See **Machinya, Johannes, 2014**: The Role of the Indigenisation policy in Community Development : A Case of the Zvishavane Community Share Ownership Trust, Zvishavane District, Zimbabwe. MA thesis, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- 12 **Ndlovu, Davy, 2014**: *In Their Own Words: A Contemporary History of the Lost and Forgotten San People in Zimbabwe*. Revised edition. Dlamini, Zimbabwe: Creative Arts and Educational Development Association.

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