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“Management of land use systems for enhanced food security:
conflicts, controversies and resolutions”

Food Security Crisis in Bwabwata National Park: Khwe San Perceptions

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Abstract

The Khwe San people of the West Caprivi are amongst the richest traditional ecological knowledge holders yet also amongst the most food insecure groups in Namibia. Once living as nomadic hunter-gatherers in vast areas in the landscape, today they had to adapt to sedentary lifestyles on only a small piece of land in the Bwabwata National Park.

Although the Khwe are among the few tribes who were allowed to remain on National Park land in Namibia, they have to comply with imposed park regulations with limited access to natural resources or benefits gained from tourism sector. In addition, their practice of traditional knowledge is slowly vanishing. Today due to very few livelihood options, and difficulties to modern life-style adaptations most of the Khwe San people live in extreme poverty and a big portion of the population is seriously malnourished due to lack of access to healthy, nourishing or traditional food.

A number of institutional development effort have been undertaken in the last decades by government (predominantly community garden projects) but most of them have died off due to lack of project management training, poor planning and also serious internal conflicts inside the community.

This first phase of my PhD study aims to assess past and present programs and initiatives addressing food security from the Khwe perspectives. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions has been carried out in April 2015 to explore a) livelihood changes that have taken place, b) the current state-of-the art vis-à-vis food security, and c) future visions and opportunities. Complementary interviews were carried out with other stakeholders (e.g. park managers and NGO employees). The findings of this research will not only help give voice to the Khwe and their perspectives and visions but may foster different, holistic approaches for finding solutions for food-security crisis in Khwe San communities.

Keywords: Food security, Namibia