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South Africa

Conquest For Life

The !Xu and Khwe San Community



A Brief Profile of Schmidtsdrift





Origins

History

The San people are one of the few groups in South Africa considered to be part of the original indigenous population. For many years, it was thought that both the language and cultural heritage of the San had become extinct due to the years of marginalization, political oppression, and migration. Recently, concern for the fate of the few San communities that remain has produced a widespread interest in developing resources that can sustain the communities and create better opportunities for their future.

The Schmidtsdrift community is made up of two distinct San tribal groups: the !Xu and the Khwe. Although both groups migrated to South Africa from Angola, the !Xu subsisted as stock farmers in central Angola, whereas the Khwe lived as cultivators in the southeast region of the country. The !Xu and the Khwe trace their ancestral lineage back to the Bushmen that once inhabited South Africa. These aboriginal Bushmen possess a rich cultural heritage and are representative of a vital part of South Africa's history.

During the 1960's and 70's, the Portuguese occupation of Angola came to an end following a turbulent civil war led by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. At the time, the majority of !Xu and Khwe men were recruited by the South African Defence Force to fight the opposition party. The SADF was particularly interested in putting the San people's exceptional tracking and hunting skills into action. Consequently, the Portuguese withdrew in 1974 and the !Xu and the Khwe were forced to flee to Namibia and Botswana for asylum.

The SADF continued to recruit the San during the bush wars in Namibia between the South West African People's Organization and the South African apartheid military. Namibia achieved its independence in 1990 and once again the San people faced persecution by the locals for participating on the side of the South Africans. Five hundred veterans of the SADF "Bushmen Battalions", along with thousands of their dependants, were relocated in 1990 from Namibia to the military training camp at Schmidtsdrift, 74 km west of the Northern Cape provincial capital of Kimberly.

Shortly after their arrival, the SADF arranged for all 4000 people of the Schmidtsdrift community to be granted South African citizenship. The political transition in South Africa had in the meantime rendered the situation of the people uncertain. As a result of a history of fighting the ANC in Angola and Namibia, the !Xu and the Khwe were sceptical as to whether the new government would provide the community with alternative land for a permanent settlement. Eventually, the Minister of Agriculture established a redistribution fund for the San people and Planfontein was purchased for R7.6 million in hopes of developing a permanent community. Currently, the !Xu

and the Khwe have been living in government issued tents for more than a decade waiting for the new area to be built.

Identity

The apartheid system in South Africa required that every individual within the society be classified and segregated according to four major racial categories, i.e., White, Black, Coloured, and Indian. The category “Coloured” became the most arbitrary racial category in that it functioned as a way of disguising the cultural heterogeneity of people who possessed African, European, Khoe, San, Indian, and Malay backgrounds. Indigenous groups were especially likely to accept this categorization due to the severely derogatory connotations associated with “Bushmen” during the apartheid years. It is not until recently that the gains made by emerging indigenous rights movements have encouraged people to reclaim and take pride in African, San, and Khoe ancestry.

The significant linguistic difference between the two indigenous San languages spoken at Schmidtsdrift is one of the key indicators of the cultural difference between the !Xu and the Khwe. Although the San languages are not as prevalently spoken as in the past, both the !Xu and Khwe languages are still widely used within the Schmidtsdrift community. San languages consist of more than 2000 distinct sounds, in comparison with only 800 distinct sounds in English. It is interesting to note that although each language functions as a tool of social bonding within each group, the languages also encourage an ethnic segregation in that each group does not learn the others language. For the younger generation, Afrikaans has become the unifying language, as it has been the official language of the local school. Although the majority of the older generation has learned some Afrikaans while employed in the military or working on white farms, they are much more likely to remain connected to traditions that maintain cultural barriers.



Schmidtsdrift

Population

Currently there are approximately 5000 people living in the community. According to a study conducted several years ago there are actually more male residents in the community, constituting 51% of the population. It is interesting to note that the same history of male labour migration prevalent in South Africa did not affect the men of Schmidtsdrift. The military has provided the !Xu and Khwe men with most of their sources of employment, thus entire families were housed at the military training camp and men were less likely to migrate to find work. As a result there is a relatively low number of female-headed households and formal employment for women is virtually non-existent.

Education and Training

A local government sponsored school exists in the community. Currently there are 1200 registered students, although the number is perceived to be much higher. Thirty-two educators commute daily from Kimberly to Schmidtsdrift, a distance of 74 km. The condition of the schoolhouses is shockingly poor. The classrooms are constructed of tin and contain a large gap between the roof and the walls connected by mesh wiring. During the cold winter months, the temperature inside each classroom is unbearably cold both for the students and the educators. All instruction is taught in Afrikaans. The school receives funding from the government to provide lunch for the students, often the only meal they consume for the day. Recently, the funding has not been sufficient enough to provide a meal for the older students. In addition, the vast majority of community members do not pursue tertiary education opportunities.

Socio-Economic Conditions

The !Xu and the Khwe have been residing in military tents for over a decade. They are subject to the harsh climatic conditions of the Northern Cape with temperatures ranging from over 40 degrees Celsius in the summer months to below freezing during the winters. Many tents are overcrowded as they are home to more than one family. The majority of the population is unemployed and must rely on monthly pensions provided by the government to sustain their livelihood. Although a local store offering food provisions has recently opened, the prices are relatively high for the standard of living existing in the community.

The community is plagued with the following realities:

- The paternalistic SADF military culture has produced a pervasive passivity and lack of initiative that could hinder the community from self-reliance in the future.
- Having been displaced from both Angola and Namibia as a result of participating in the South African military has created sense of distrust of outsiders.
- The meager conditions of the temporary camp have demoralized the people and driven many to deep despondency manifested in alcohol abuse and domestic violence.

A few years ago, an Irish psychologist working with San community members discovered that the older generation still holds resentment towards the injustices inflicted on them during their years serving in the SADF. Furthermore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has recognized that the San were exposed to extreme forms of racism, coercion, and brutality at the hands of the apartheid military. The trauma from these experiences is evident in the self-destructive tendencies of many community members.

Planfontein

It is evident that the Provincial Government created unrealistic expectations that it could develop a free housing settlement for the !Xu and Khwe. Cultivable land available at Planfontein can only sustain approximately 60 people, though the original plan includes all 5000 current residents of Schmidtsdrift. The South African National Defense Force continues to be financially responsible for the majority of operational costs in Schmidtsdrift, spending close to R800,000 per month. Subsequent to the San community relocating to Planfontein, the funding from the SANDF will no longer be accessible and as a result it is unclear how the community will suddenly become self-reliant.

In addition to the problems facing relocation and the continuous delays imposed by the government, the !Xu and Khwe are also experiencing pressure from interested parties. The Tswanas have claimed the Schmidtsdrift area as their traditional homeland and consequently a Land Claim Settlement Agreement was signed on April 2000 to return the land to its original inhabitants. Furthermore, the New Diamond Corporation has indicated that the area is rich in diamond ores, and thus the corporation is interested forming a relationship with the community to facilitate mining the land. According to the Mineral Acts Empowerment Charter, the community is entitled to have 20% direct equity participation on the project. Nevertheless, no action can be taken until the !Xu and the Khwe are finally relocated.



Conquest For Life

Conquest For Life was introduced to the Schmidtdrift community in 2000 by APSO, an Irish volunteer organization that had previously placed a psychologist to work with the !Xu and Khwe. Since then Conquest For Life has maintained close ties with the community in hopes of developing a self-sustainable youth empowerment program.

Our Programs

- *Leadership Program*

One of the most effective methods of impacting the development of the Schmidtdrift community on a long-term basis is to focus on equipping the youth with the type of Life Skills that will encourage motivation, confidence, and leadership. Conquest For Life offers youth from the Schmidtdrift community an opportunity to attend a nine-week leadership program in which they are able to participate in a three-week Life Skills camp, a three-week Basic Computer Training course, and a final three-week period in which the participants join our various projects to obtain experience in both coordinating and implementing programs. In addition, the social skills gained from exposure to Johannesburg, a drastically contrasting metropolis to Schmidtdrift, develops the participants ability to interact with people of different backgrounds. Four youths participated in the leadership program last year, and have positively expressed the benefit the program has had on their communication skills and motivation to carry out development projects in Schmidtdrift. Currently, the past participants are coordinating Conquest For Life's other programs in the community.

- *After School Care*

Presently, Conquest For Life has begun an after school program in which children between the ages of 6-17 have the opportunity to be in a safe and stimulating environment. The program operates every weekday from 12:30 – 16:00 hours. Children are given time to complete homework or receive tutoring, followed by scheduled activities related to the following themes: promoting a positive self-image, conflict resolution, skills development, and issues related to substance abuse and HIV/AIDS. These activities will include discussions and experiential learning through games. In addition children are encouraged to socialize with their peers through sports, dance, and singing.

- *Holiday Program*

During each school holiday, Conquest For Life invites children from each of its programs to attend a one-week camp located at its Dreamlands Farm House in De Deur. The purpose is to offer the children a safe and structured environment to socialize with their peers. The week’s activities include: teambuilding and trust building games, sing-along sessions, nature walks, sports, treasure hunts, movies, and a talent show.

The Future

Young people who are not allowed to be part of the solution will always be part of the problem. – Margo Strom

Conquest For Life plans to extend its services to the !Xu and Khwe in hopes of establishing an enriching program sustained by the youth of the community. It is our aim to continue and expand our current projects as well as introduce new programs that will improve social stability, promote positive relationships, equip youth with employable skills, and offer valuable experiences for school children.

- *Job Creation Project*

One of the major difficulties facing the San people is the lack of skills training available for them to acquire the credentials necessary to find employment. Conquest For Life intends to offer the youth of the community an opportunity to take part in the Job Creation Project held at its main location in Johannesburg. The project consists of a holistic program of activities that develop young people’s business skills and provide practical work experience. The theoretical portion of the course is made up of a series of workshops covering the following topics:

MARKETING	The Marketing Mix (Price, Product, Place, Promotion), Need Satisfaction. Market Research & Surveys, Marketing Methods, Marketing Plan
SALES	Introduction to sales, Fields of Salesmanship, Communication, Prospecting for Customers, Sales Presentation , Dealing with Objections, Sale Closing, Record Keeping, Negotiations, Time and Territory Management
BUSINESS PLANNING	Budgeting, Financial Planning and Forecasting, Registration and Licensing, Market Analysis, Company Activities, Products and Services, Documentation, Company Structure
PROJECT MANAG.	Project Leader, Objectives, Contracts and Agreements, Organization, Control and Ongoing Evaluation
BUSINESS MANAG.	Administration, Records, Goal, and Target Setting, Progress Evaluation, Salaries, Benefits - Self and Employees, Legal Aspects, Financial Records, Personnel.

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The workshops are supplemented with practical, hands-on training in three departments: detergent production, electrical appliance wiring and repair, and upholstery. Each department will also include theory and production for a period of three months. In turn, the products manufactured through the detergent and upholstery departments will be sold to the community at a discounted rate in order to contribute funding to the project.

- *Siyasizana Youth Service Project*

The Youth Service Project is a new youth development program Conquest For Life is currently embarking on to address the national unemployment crisis. The program consists of educational elements provided by Randse Afrikaanse University and Technikon, supplemented by community service internships. The participants will be trained in early childhood development, community law, facilitation, mediation, counseling, youth work and childcare. Simultaneously, participants will be employed as part-time youth assistants in schools, after care programs, crèche's, places of safety and in the local juvenile courts. During the course of the year, the members of the Siyasizana Project will participate in community service activities that interactively apply and strengthen skills acquired through formal educational courses.