

Indigenous community in Namibia works with Lutheran church to advocate for land rights

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Pathways to Equality youth gain skills in advocacy for land rights and establish the groundwork for long-term economic resilience. (Photo courtesy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia)

In Namibia, the San people have often been regarded as primitive hunters and gatherers whose lifestyle hinders development. Now, through an initiative with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) and community representatives, a group of San people in the Mangetti Dune village have embarked on a project to empower young people.

Pathways to Equality: Bushmen Youth, Livelihoods, and Economic Justice will help equip young people to address the historic inequalities the San people, also known as Bushmen, have faced.

In April, the church conducted training sessions on entrepreneurship and life skills involving five youth groups. Each group received 10,000 Namibian dollars (around EUR 500) to engage in handcrafts, small livestock rearing, and horticulture.

“The project has been truly transformational, not only for the beneficiaries but also for us as the Lutheran church. We have learnt and continue to gather daily knowledge that we feel should benefit everyone,” said Linda Chikerema, the ELCIN’s project advisor.

One of the objectives is to recognize the importance of addressing trauma and its link to developing new initiatives in a community. The aspect of labeling has been highlighted, “with many participants saying the term marginalized group was not empowering and subconsciously forced them to operate under that label,” Chikerema said.

Ashenafi Haile, program executive for the Lutheran World Federation's Diakonia and Development program said “it is encouraging to see how the Namibian church is supporting the country’s indigenous population to investigate and document their own truth and reconciliation processes.”

The ELCIN and the Mangetti Dune community are working on a publication that will document the cultural resurgence and adaptive strategies of the San people in Namibia.

The document will explore the challenges and opportunities the San people face in shaping their own development trajectories, advocate for indigenous-led development approaches that prioritize cultural integrity and community and empowerment, and foster knowledge-sharing between the church, indigenous communities, and academic institutions.

The Lutheran World Federation provides support for Pathways for Equality through its Diakonia and Development program.—Lutheran World Federation