

A Socio-Economic Analysis Of The Lives And Livelihoods Of The Kuiseb Topnaar

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Abstract

The Topnaar are a people living in- and outside of the Namib Naukluft National Park in the central Namib. The study, which aimed to characterize the Topnaar and update existing sources on them, collected data through socio-economic field surveys and interviews looking at aspects such as population structure, income status, sources of income and occupations.

Most people living in the Topnaar community along the Kuiseb basin are adults and young ones. This group of people was known as pastoralists, hunter and gatherer. They also made use of sea resource but due to increase in commercializing fishing it is now impossible (Werner, 2003).

The number of children is more than the number of adults in the Kuiseb because of the schools, which accommodate a substantial number of children from grade 1-7, although there are also some children who are not in school

1. Introduction

This study looked at aspects of the Topnaar community such as education levels, health, interests, age and sex structures, income levels and sources. The project aims to draw a demographic report of the Topnaar, to assess the changes in their living styles and to determine what causes the differences in levels of development between different settlements. The detailed interviews capture their present and future interests on things that they wish to see in their settlement in future. After covering all these aims I updated some of the existing data on the Topnaar. Data collection was done through field interviews, which were divided into two parts: one of which was household interviews (visiting each household) and a second follow-up study on a selected number of individuals from households who were interviewed in detail.

Gobabeb conducts much research into both the ecology of the central Namib Desert and the livelihoods of the Topnaar; some researchers coming to Gobabeb would like to work direct with the Topnaar community or to know about the Topnaar. They will need up to date or recent secondary data. There have been studies conducted on the Topnaars' livelihoods and socio-economic status (Ross 1971; Janknis & Brain 1967; Dentlinger 1977 and 1983; Werner 2003) but they require updates.

From previous studies, the majority of the Topnaar living in the Kuiseb have a low level of education: according to a study in the early 1980s, 45% of the rural Topnaar had no school education at all, with only 29 out of 200-300 people having obtained class 4. Of those households spoken to in this study, 19% did not have any education at all (Dentlinger 1983). Another study in the late 1970s into the population structure of the Topnaar showed that most of people in the community were either old or still children, with few teenagers or young to middle-aged adults present. As people in the early 20s to 45 yrs are up in towns like Walvis Bay and Swakopmund looking for jobs. (Dentlinger 1977). The average age of heads of households in one more recent study was approximately 65 years, female heads being slightly older (Werner 2003). During my study I found that people downstream are trying to build better houses than those upstream. One house downstream was found built with wooden planks and satellite dish for DSTV.

2. Study area

The study covered the entire community of 300-400 individuals excluding those living in Walvis Bay, Swakopmund and other places in Namibia. The study area is about 70 km along the Kuiseb River from Homeb to Rooibank.

3. Project Objectives

- 3.1 To update the data existing on socio-economic conditions in the Topnaar community.
- 3.2 To capture the demographic information of the Topnaar
- 3.3 To capture the Topnaars' present and future interests.
- 3.4 To assess the change in living styles of the Topnaar
- 3.5 To determine what might cause differences in level of development between different settlement (proximity to Walvis Bay, for instance)

4. Material and Methods

4.1 Materials

Materials used in the data collection and analysis:

1. Car for transport from the station to settlements.
2. Interpreter to maintain the conversation between the respondents and I.
3. Tape recorder for recording responses in a detailed interview.
4. Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software was used in arranging the data in order and to analyze the data.
5. MS Excel software was used for selecting a sample for the small detailed interview.

4.2 Methods

Data collection was done through socio-economic field surveys. Two methods of data collection were used: interviews and direct observations. Interviews were split into two phases: scheduled household interviews and more open-ended detailed interviews.

4.2.1. General & broad interview

This interviewing method covered as many households as possible in all 16 settlements, using a **scheduled structured interview method**. This method uses an established set of questions with fixed wordings and sequence of presentation, and the indication on how to answer each question (Bless & Higson, 2000). This questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was based on informative or objective questions, these questions ask about facts such as: age, employment, income and some social aspects. This questionnaire was presented to each person in exactly the same way to be able to objectively compare results. 52 households were interviewed and there were 55 respondents, 18 of them females and 37 of them male.

4.2.2 Detailed follow-up interview

This form of interview was to get the Topnaars present and future development interests particularly such projects as tourism, crop farming and aquaculture. A sample of 30 people was randomly drawn from a sampling frame of the scheduled interview results. Household names were put in MS Excel as a sampling frame and settlements of randomly selected names were identified and we went directly to respective persons. The sample included households that were empty during our initial interviews in order to make sure that individuals from each settlement had fair chance of being selected.

This questionnaire (see Appendix 2) consisted of questions such as knowledge questions, which were basically looking at the knowledge of the respondent on the question on which he/she is going to give opinions on, and opinion questions that were seeking their opinions on particular subjects.

From the sample of 30 individuals, 20 were able to have time to answer questions in the second interview. 10 of the sample could not be reached, four of 10 people were out to some places and the remaining six could not say anything, because they were busy or insecure about the whole survey. Some thought maybe we were “secret investigating agents” and refused to answer our questions.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Results.

All the results are from 55 respondents interviewed in a general household interview, 20 from the small detailed interviews, and field observations.

5.1.1 Population structure

The population estimate for the Kuiseb Topnaar is 726 individuals young and old. This might not be the actual population, is just an estimate drawn from the number of people that were found during interviews and households in the Kuiseb. The average number of people per household was calculated, by the total population from interviews over interviewed households. Then average was then multiplied by the total households for all settlement. Since many settlements included households that have been empty for some time, it is almost certainly an over-estimate of the population.

Most people living in the Kuiseb are young people aged from a month to 18 years, as the groups with manpower are in urban areas for work. Some young children are brought home to their grandparents to be taken care of while their parents are in town working or enjoying urban life. In Armstraat during interviews we found about 15 children under school age and it was not the whole Armstraat but part of it this show there is a need of children facilities in these areas. Utuseb is one of the big settlements with the high population and many children and a pre school was promised to them by one of the stakeholders.

These children only visit their relatives during weekends and holidays. In the active group of young to middle-aged adults that is still in the Kuiseb the majority are men who are taking care of family livestock. Some of these are school dropouts or never went to school at all. The population is structured in a situation where there are more men than women and more children than adults.

The number of children is more than the number of adults in the Kuiseb because of the schools, which accommodate a substantial number of children from grade 1-7, although there are also some children who are not in school. There are about 147 children in the Kuiseb settlements, 102 of them are at school age and 45 are below 5 years old. . This number of children does not include non-Topnaar children schooling at Utuseb (Brand primary) but it includes some of the Topnaar children temporarily in Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, and elsewhere in Namibia.

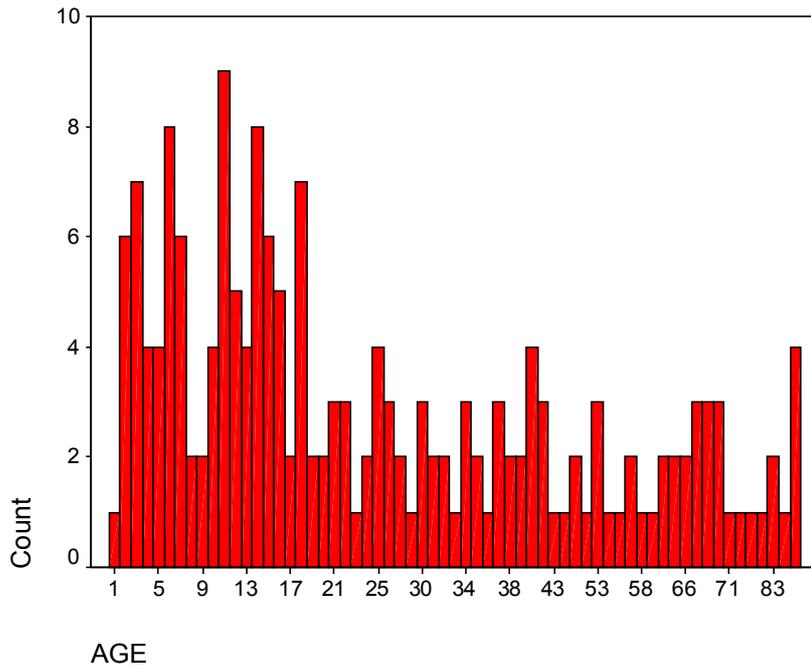


Figure 1: Population age structures in the Kuiseb 2006 (n =181)

In some settlements, for example Soutrivier, the ages of children had to be estimated because some parents did not give their ages to us. It was difficult also to get ages of children whose parents are not with them.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of Topnaar age 2006

AGE

N	Valid	181
	Missing	10
Mean		26.08
Median		18.00
Mode		11

The average age of the population that was interviewed is 26years and the majority are children with 11 years of age.

5.1.2 Education

After analyzing my data on education levels, I found that 26.6% of rural Topnaar spoken to did not have any school education, with 63.8% of adults having received school education (grade1- tertiary). For 9.6% of the population I could not get any information on education levels. Some children at school age (6-17 yrs) were found at home, not in schools. The reasons given by parents were that there was not enough space in school, that there was a lack of money to pay for their children in school and that the distance from their villages to school is long and too much for children. One parent at Oswater said it was hard for her to put her children in school because it is far and she can not afford paying the hostel.

Most of the people in the Kuiseb end in grade 7 and only some will go to grade 8, 9 and 10 or up to tertiary. This is because the available school in the Kuiseb goes up to grade 7, and some teenagers after grade 7 cannot go any further because funding accommodation in town can be difficult. Some parents cannot afford to pay for tuition and accommodation expenses for their children to go to school in town, and some parents are struggling with what they have to pay for their children to continue schooling.

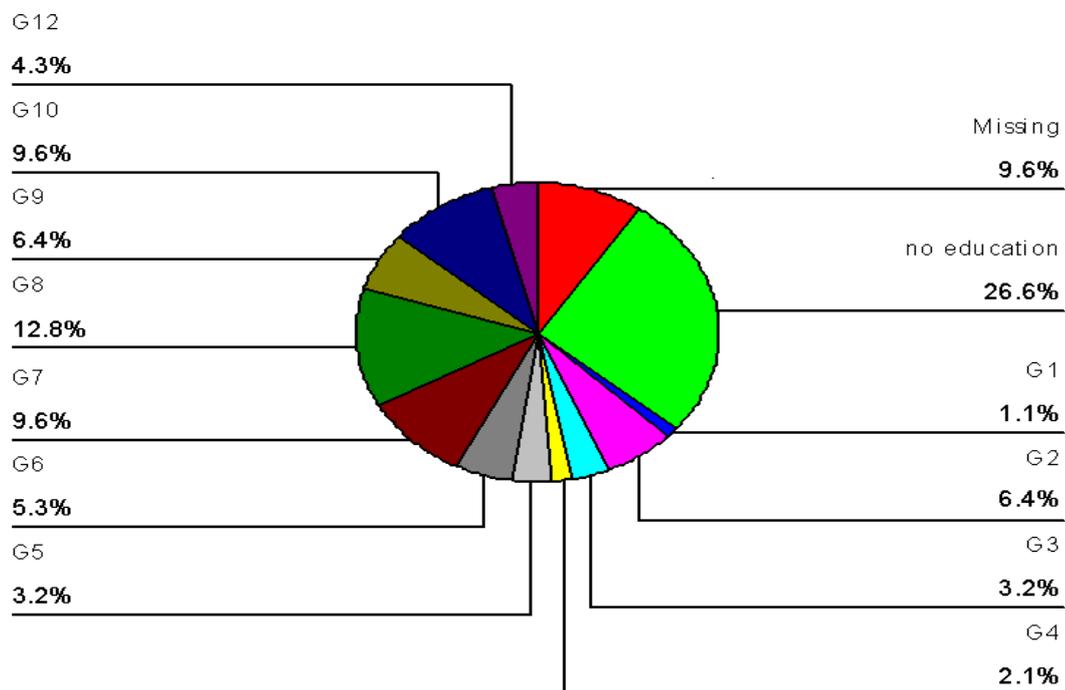


Figure 1. Education levels of adults Topnaar (June 2006), n= 175

Table 3 Children education and population structure 2006

<i>Total number of Topnaar children in Kuiseb</i>	<i>Number of children in school</i>	<i>Number of school aged children not in school</i>	<i>Number of children under school age</i>
147	47.6%	21.8%	30.6%

Most of the children have nothing to keep them busy as figures show that a number of children who need school and under age is more than the ones in school. This shows that more services such as class rooms and pre schools are needed.

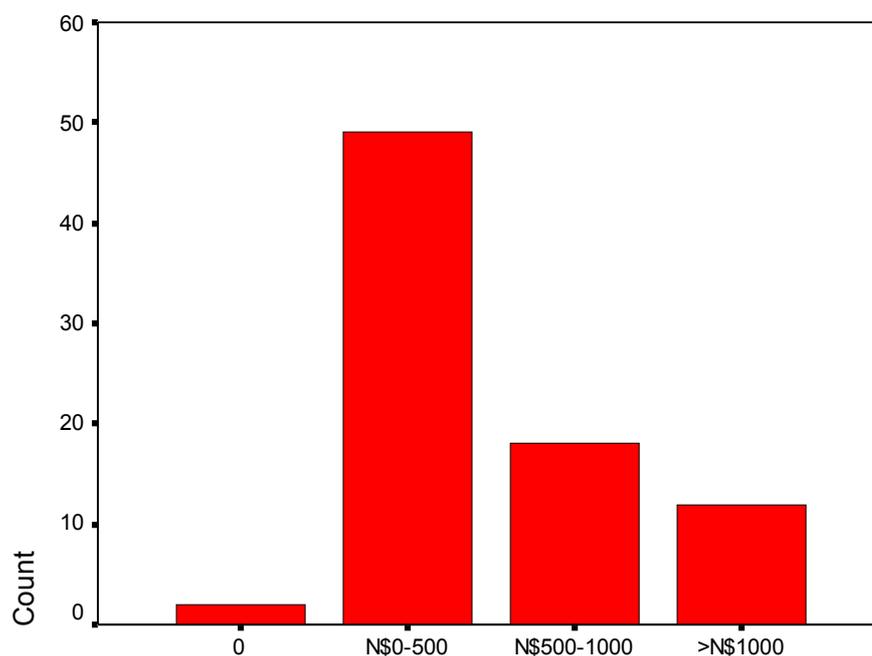
5.1.3 Income

The Kuiseb communities have different sources of incomes: paid jobs, selling !Nara melons, Ana tree pods, and livestock pensions. The majority get an income in the range of N \$0-500 per month. Their sources of income vary by seasons and they sometimes face difficulties in getting income from their main sources, because !Nara and Ana tree pods are seasonal and in their absence people return to poverty. I came up with such large income categories because I assume that is a better way for getting such information, because not everyone will be able to give his/ her exact monthly income, so it is better to give ranges for them to put themselves in.

Not much income is generated by selling !Nara because of the labour involved, [during !Nara harvesting people move to the !Nara fields in temporal structures]. !Nara processing requires water and water problems in the Kuiseb, makes it difficult for people to make a substantial income to pay off the time and energy spent. Not many people are engaged in !nara harvesting because of the labor involved which is a bit heavy and time costing and

some are far from the !nara fields and to go and harvest they need to go and build temporal structures for accommodation as one respondent said.

About 20 out of the 175 adults identified by household surveys are getting pension funds from the government, an amount of N\$360 per month. They are some of the few receiving income on a monthly basis: employment opportunities are few in the Kuiseb. There are some people working for wages in places such as Gobabeb, Utuseb School (Brand Primary) as teacher and social workers, as social workers for Namwater Rooibank. Some are also working in local surface mines, and some hold positions with qualifications.



Monthly income per household for the Topnaar

Figure 3: Topnaar monthly income per household (June 2006) n=175

5.1.4 Livestock

Livestock is the main source of most Topnaars' livelihoods. They mainly raise goats, donkeys, sheep, cattle and poultry. But people are keeping more than they should have: as one expert informant told us, "the number of donkeys is increasing and only few people eat donkey meat, as they are valued for transportation and those animals they eat anything eatable and when it comes to grazing they graze everything" (Chief Seth Kooitje, pers. comm.). The number of livestock in the Kuiseb is getting high compared to the carrying capacity of the area, but because it is their traditional way of living to some of them it is normal. We asked

households visited about the number of livestock they are farming with, most of the are farming with small stocks such as goats and sheep they also have few cattle.

5.1.5 Health services and status

A clinic is available next to Utuseb School (see Chapter Y [Shomeya's chapter]) and a mobile clinic from Walvis Bay visits the community twice a month. When they were asked how often they visit the local clinic in a month, most people said they only do so when they are seriously sick and some said they wait for the mobile clinic to visit them. The record from the Utuseb clinic provides that 15-20 people visit the clinic per day with more or less 150 people visiting per month from all ages (including non-Topnaar from the Utuseb School). In a personal conversation the clinic's nurse informed us that many children up to the age of 7 years had trouble with facial skin diseases problems, especially in March. Adults from 18 years and up have problems with hypertension diseases, muscular pains and skeletal disorders.

5.1.6 Present and future interests

There are common interests shown by people in different settlements. They are things that the whole community needs and some by different settlements and individuals. 100% of the samples have a positive attitude toward the tourism developments; most of them feel tourism will improve the welfare of the Kuiseb Topnaar. Not everyone will benefit directly but they believe the community status and welfare will be improved. Tourism developments will provide market areas and opportunities for the community to sell their !Nara, melons, seeds, and oil. 25% of the sample have negative attitudes toward crop farming, 65% have positive attitudes on crop farming and 10% are neutral: they do not know if crop farming is good for the community considering water problems.

5.1.7 Ways of life

The Topnaar way of life has not changed much since the last study was conducted on their ways of life by Dentlinger, they still raise livestock and harvest !Nara as part of their tradition. Buildings structures, though some are willing to improve on their buildings still, resemble the traditional ones (Ross 1971) most of their current houses still look like those Ross pictured in 1971, the shape is still the same and the building materials are still the same, and this that *he* says that those houses resemble traditional ones]. Donkey carts were the main traditional form of transport, and while many Topnaar do still use donkey carts this is gradually changing to more modern means. Some Topnaar ride bicycles like five of the social workers at Gobabeb they travel to and from their settlement with bicycles and some are using cars like

one of the social workers at Gobabeb drive a car to work, although the traditional way is still dominant. Traditionally, the Topnaar obtained water from hand-dug wells; now they use solar pumps and many drink water from taps. Like many tribes their traditional way of dressing has changed from traditional to modern.

5.1.8 Differences in levels of developments in settlements.

Communities upstream have more livestock and bigger gardens than those downstream. Some gave the reason for having small gardens and small herds of livestock as high water charges: people downstream are paying for water from Namwater, while those upstream do not pay for water use by volume. Some people downstream have better houses built with wooden planks and better zinc iron sheets, I assume because they are close to the coastal town and transport is cheaper for them. There are more people with cars down stream and some individuals have satellite dishes downstream. I also assume proximity to town has an impact on development levels because cost of transport is low for people close to town.

I grouped settlements in two parts, (Down and Upstream) according to their water supplies to see if water supply has an impact on developments and welfare of the inhabitants. Upstream settlements are supplied by solar pumps and downstream get water from Namwater in Walvis Bay. Upstream settlements pay for the maintenance of their solar pumps while downstream pay for water consumptions to Namwater. Upstream settlements begin from Homeb to Swartbank and downstream are from Utuseb to Armstraat. More livestock are found upstream where water is enough, with one household having 100 goats and 80 sheep the second one with 100 goats only. They have more water dependent livestock, (cattle and donkeys) upstream than downstream.

Table 4: Difference in livestock population up and downstream.

<i>Livestock</i>	<i>Upstream</i>	<i>Downstream</i>
Goats	696	392
Cattle	62	13
Donkeys	168	81
Sheep	116	1
Poultry	65	73

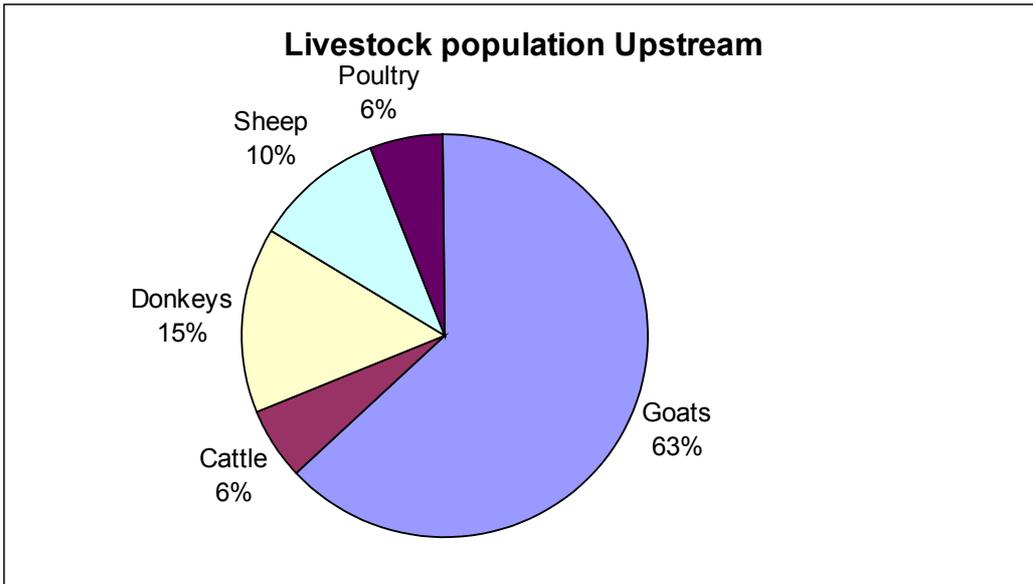


Figure 4:

Livestock population distribution upstream (N = 1107)

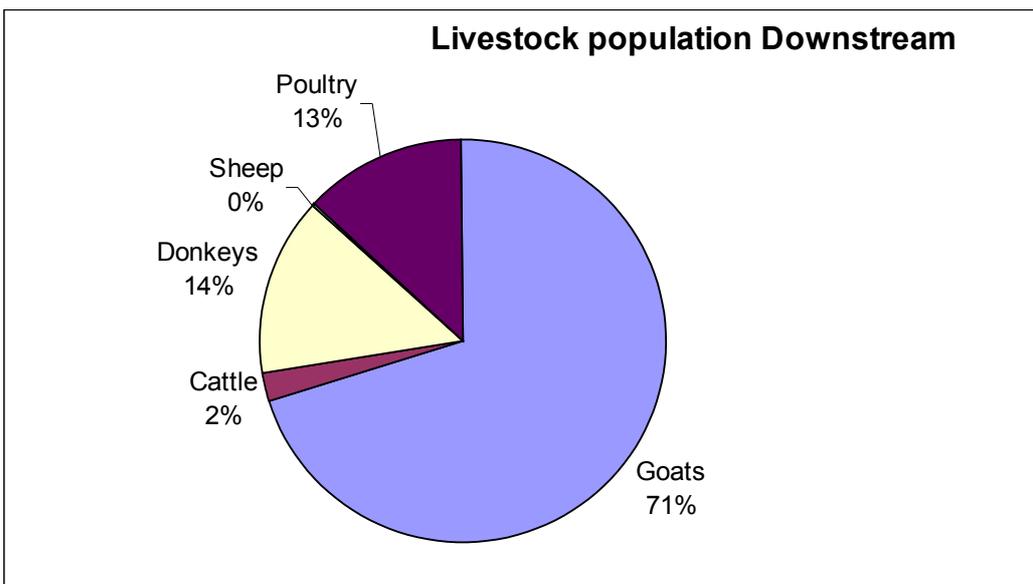


Figure 5:

Livestock population distribution downstream (N=560)

6. Discussions

People feel they are a small community and they can develop but because of the park rules lack some facilities restrict the from developing. They are interested in seeing development projects in their area, such as needlework (where women would spend time making towels, table cloths, school uniforms and clothing for sale), tourism, road maintenance, projects involving youth and community gardens with help from experts in crop-farming. 100% of the respondents downstream need the water system to change, they want the same

water supply services as people upstream, such as solar pumps or windmills. “It is a small community but we need police services. We are missing some of our properties but because Walvis Bay is far we just give up on searching for our belongings”.

Opportunities are limited in the Kuiseb, which is a reason some families are divided: family members are forced to go out and look for something that will help the family. People leave their home and go to places such as Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Windhoek and other parts of Namibia. Although this is common in rural areas there are more push factors in the Kuiseb than pull factors: adults with the ability to work are pushed out by lack or few job opportunities. Sometimes family status plays a roll: people need to improve their family status by bringing wealth and to do so they need to leave and look for opportunities. With 31.3% of school aged children not in school, this mean if nothing will be done to improve the situation in future it will be worse: about 30 % of children are under school age, and one settlement has about 13 kids under school age.

The education is gradually improving in the Kuiseb compared to few decades ago. For some reasons some people only manage to end up in their primary education. The school that is available for the Kuiseb community ends in grade 7 and for people who cannot afford to leave the Kuiseb and proceed with their secondary school they are forced to end in primary school. Some people have no relatives where they can go and continue with school; while some can afford to rent a place in Walvis or Swakopmund some families cannot. With grade 7 school reports it is not easy to get a job; certainly it could be a bit easier with a secondary school certificate. The government should “upgrade the Utuseb (Brand primary) School to Grade 10”, as one interviewee suggested, to give the opportunity of going to secondary school to those who cannot afford life outside of the Kuiseb. A person with a grade 10 certificate “has the opportunity to get a job” in shops, the police force and other workplaces.

Income is most people’s main means of survival. This means if you are a low-income generator, your life status is likely to be low too. The main source of income for the Topnaar is livestock and !Nara. People are facing difficulties with the marketing of their products: if they need money and have no local customer they are forced to go to the markets in Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. This means the profit is low; people have to pay for transport to and from markets. People are forced to sell their products at low prices because they are desperate and need money urgently. Sometimes farmers from other places come to the Kuiseb to buy livestock, but this market is not fair because buyers will try to buy what they want on low price, and community are losing their livestock. The Topnaar community should be provided

with an auction house for their livestock to sell to some farmers, because they are some farmers who are coming from some places and come to buy goats in settlements like the one we saw at Klipneus, this will encourage people to have fewer, better quality livestock and an open market for some products such as !Nara melon, seeds and oil. Though the cultural centre at Utuseb is on the way to be constructed and they will have better market place.

Without livestock, to some Topnaar everyday life will be everyday struggle because it is their main livelihood. Those who do not have livestock in the Kuiseb are considered poor; it is their traditional way of surviving. Their livestock feed along the Kuiseb River and most of the livestock are browsers, which have enough food on plants along the river. They mainly browse on plant leaves, melons and pods; because they have less grazing materials due to low rainfall.

For a community to live longer it has to be healthy and to be healthy you need health services. Due to distance some members of the community receive health services when they cannot ignore the pain. Some people have to travel for over 40 kilometers to the local clinic. One interviewee suggested that “it is hard for a sick person to travel a long distance to the clinic in a donkey car. It could be better if there was a small consultant clinic at Gobabeb for people upriver” to reduce long walking distance.

7. Recommendations

The state should look at Topnaar life status and the condition of the environment they live in. If the government or any stakeholder would make an effort to upgrade the local school to grade 10, there would be more opportunities for poor people. Children under 6 years who are in the Kuiseb need recreational areas, basic education and play grounds. Stakeholders such as the government and other NGO's can provide a kinder garden at Utuseb and Armstraat.

They have few opportunities in their area to better their welfare; they are allowed to have livestock in the park, which is their main source of income but they are facing market problems. The community can try to consult MET and ask for a market place and build their own market where they can sell their own products and produce. MET should look forward into the policies and regulations of the park, mostly on buildings. Some people are willing to “sacrifice what they have to build better houses, but they are afraid to because the house would belong to MET” (Chief Seth Kooitje, pers. comm.). At least the government of Namibia should

subsidize building materials. The community could pay a certain amount and the government pays the rest. Some stakeholders can help with building materials.

Gobabeb, as a close partner of the community and facilitator of studies in the community, should make sure that the community are aware of the study or survey that needs their cooperation. It is hard to meet everyone in all villages but at least part of them, or through the chief's community meetings. The communities are getting worried about people coming to them and asking them questions; with the fear they may hold back information.

Students and researchers doing their research in the community should make sure that the community understands the research and its purpose if possible. At the end of the survey results should be presented to the community.

8. Conclusion

I stayed in the Kuiseb area for six months, interacting with some community members and witnessing some aspects in life, though it is not long enough to conclude. Kuiseb Topnaar lives in low soil nutrient lands, and low seasonal rainfall and this situation makes it difficult for them in practicing crop-farming activities. They are restricted from other land use activities by the policies of the park. What will people who are not working, few of whom have businesses and who have restricted rights on their land do to improve their welfare? The government and MET should prioritize to better the life of the Topnaar.

Few people between 18-40 years are found in the Kuiseb. The youth need things to keep them entertained. Because they are limited in the Kuiseb and restricted in the park they tend to go out to some place, searching for the life they cannot find at home. Leaving adds more responsibilities to old people at home, such as looking after livestock and taking care of young children; this keeps old people busy for more time.

Education is the most important aspect in life and life has been so hard for some people and they even fail to continue studying, because of situation such as, space in school and money. What will a person with a grade 7 school report do in life?

One of the rules and regulations of the national park is that there may be "no unauthorized land use developments" [who are you quoting?] in the national park. Any development taking place in the park will belong to the state. This makes it difficult for the Topnaar to develop their houses because they will belong to the state. It rarely rains in the Namib Desert, but during the rain season that I witnessed, how would people in wooden pole houses escape from sleepless nights?