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Success Story

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Indigenous Minority Group and Tourism Sector Partner To Create a Future Of Shared Opportunity

The Hai//om San are an indigenous minority group who historically hunted and gathered food in present-day Etosha National Park, the largest national park in northern Namibia. Many Hai//om San lived in the park until the former South Africa administration forcibly evicted most of them in 1954. Because of this displacement and a long history of marginalization, the Hai//om San are considered one of the most vulnerable minority groups in Namibia.

In fact, due to their history of marginalization, most Hai//om San have little access to employment or a consistent cash income. They have also been deprived of land to call their own. Although they live in and around Etosha National Park, they have not had formal opportunities to directly benefit from the lucrative tourism industry centered on the park.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation is changing that. As part of its five-year, \$304 million compact, MCC is working to create tourism-based livelihood opportunities for the Hai//om San living in and around Etosha National Park.

In September 2012, the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism awarded an exclusive access tourism concession to an association representing the Hai//om San. The concession gives the association rights to bring tourists into Etosha National Park to visit an important waterhole for wildlife and to share the area's cultural heritage. The concession will enable the association also to attract investment from the private sector to build and jointly manage a tourism lodge on land recently transferred to the Hai//om San outside the park.

“The issuance of this concession by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to the !Gobaub Community Association is a huge achievement as it will allow the Hai//om San to directly benefit from tourism in Etosha National Park for the first time,” said Oliver Pierson, MCC’s Resident Country Director for the Namibia Compact. “We really appreciate the leadership of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to make this opportunity available and the willingness of the Hai//om San community to enter into a concession agreement for the! Gobaub site, and we hope this concession will lead to tangible benefits for the association.”



Hai//om San children living adjacent to Etosha National Park hope to benefit from increased tourism.

Unique challenges and solutions

The Government of Namibia recognizes that the Hai//om San face unique development challenges. In 2005, it prioritized development efforts for San communities throughout Namibia via a Cabinet Decision. As part of this effort, the Namibian government purchased seven commercial farms along the southern border of Etosha National Park for members of the Hai//om San community. Transfer of the farms to the Hai//om San enables them to raise livestock, harvest natural products and produce crops.

But these activities might not be enough to spark sustainable economic growth opportunities for the Hai//om San now living on these farms.

Under the compact's Tourism Project, MCC is funding about \$35 million in new infrastructure and staff housing in Etosha National Park. To reinforce the strong link between this infrastructure and sustainable economic growth in northern Namibia, MCC and the Government of Namibia agreed to make a series of management and policy reforms to ensure that Etosha National Park serves as the engine of regional economic development.

The Government of Namibia was required to meet these reforms before MCC would begin infrastructure investments in Etosha National Park. One of these reforms was a commitment to issue four exclusive tourism conservancies in national parks—including two exclusive access concessions in Etosha—to communal conservancies or other community-based associations.

These tourism concessions will give the recipients unique tourism products to develop and market, such as game drives to the !Gobaub waterhole, and should provide a basis to attract enough tourists to make joint venture eco-lodges viable, which in turn will generate substantial revenue for the community-based associations. The government awarded its first exclusive tourism concession in Etosha National Park to a conservancy in 2011; in September 2012, the newly-created association representing the Hai//om San, known as the !Gobaub Community Association, received the second concession.

Public-Private Partnerships

Private sector investment should generate substantial revenue for the association, which will receive a share of the lodge revenue. They will then use these resources to support development activities on their farms. MCC will support the association in establishing basic governance procedures and identifying a private sector partner. The association can also apply for funding through the Millennium Challenge Account-Namibia Conservancy Development Grant Fund to help establish the joint venture lodge.

This concession gives the Hai//om San formal access and rights to the !Gobaub area of the park, which has long held substantial cultural significance for them. Hai//om San Chief David //Khamuxab said, "We are very glad to receive this concession, and we will work hard and hope that the concession will change our livelihoods by bringing activities such as joint venture partnerships to our community."