

## **CHAPTER 6. PROVISIONING OF EDUCATION FOR THE HIMBA AND ZEMBA**

### **6.1. Introduction**

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the empirical data generated during the field study with the aim of elucidating the concept of education for all and the phenomenon of education provisioning to nomadic people within the context of the study, thereby shedding light on its actual outcomes beyond the classroom perspective and the limits of its expected results. It will also spell out cultural factors that might explain why school enrolment and learner performance in the nomadic pastoral groups is lower compared with the non-nomads. Furthermore, the chapter presents evidence gathered during the field study regarding the equity and quality of education among nomadic pastoralists living in a developing country context, such as Namibia.

The empirical data were generated using multiple data collection strategies in order to answer the central research question as to whether developing countries like Namibia succeed in securing equity and quality of education for nomadic people, such as the Himba and Zemba in the north west of Kunene region, where socio-economic and culture factors mitigate against the provision of education. In Africa, like other developing nations, the movement of nomadic groups presents many challenges for both educational service providers and by users (Kratli, 2001). In this chapter I have therefore attempted to link the collected data to the main question to understand the relationship between policy and practice in the context of education for all. It is based on a review of policy documents and academic literature concerning nomadic pastoralist and education provision.

The chapter outlines whether the Namibian equity driven policy succeeds in redressing its intended purpose of equal education resources, human resources and all necessary conditions that facilitate a good learning and teaching environment for the Himba and Zemba has been achieved.

The chapter present key study findings, and are done according to the research questions and subsidiary questions. In the first part of this chapter, I present a broader analysis of provisioning education before and prior independence in 1990, while in the

last part, I paid a focused attention to the establishment of mobile school programme and community level understanding, where the key findings are presented and supported with empirical evidence in the form of central themes, and sub-themes. The chapter also presents five common challenges facing education sectors around the world, including Namibia; provision of physical facilities, provision of human resources, instructional resources, enrolments and dropout rates among nomad groups, and other observations.

## 6.2. Education provisioning in pre-independent Namibia

Prior to independence in 1990, schooling in the country was a privilege of the few. Education was not seen as a right, but a privilege reserved mainly for white Namibians, while the majority of indigenous Namibians received an inferior education. Even then, it did not reach all of the people of Namibia, especially the nomadic Himba, Zemba, and other semi-nomadic groups in the east and northwest of Namibia. These groups have been excluded from education due to cultural and political factors influencing post-independent Namibia. It did not matter at that time whether children attended school or not. Under South African rule, the education system was divided along ethnic and racial lines. The education system was characterized by acute disparities, and inequities. Policies of racial discrimination have left a legacy of differential allocation of resources for the various racial groups. The geographical division of the population in the Namibian was determined by the apartheid laws and regulations, which, while allowing temporary labour migration, restricted the non-white population to the 'reserves', also known as 'homelands' or 'Bantustans' (Mbamba, 1987:43).

In Namibia, as in many other African countries, formal schooling was first introduced by European missionaries, and was used to teach indigenous people how to read the Bible so that they could spread the Gospel. This religious education in Namibia was later utilised by the German colonisers (who conquered the territory in 1884) as a means of colonisation and racial segregation. Indigenous people were provided with well-calculated limiting skills to ensure that they remained manual workers who would provide cheap labour to the white minority. Namibia (known as *Deutsch-Südwestafrika* under German control) became a Mandate territory controlled by South Africa in 1915 (Thornberry, 2004; Cohen, 1994; Columbia Electronic encyclopaedia website).

Eventually the South African apartheid system was also introduced in Namibia, along with its policies of separation. South Africa established reserves (later known as 'Bantustans' or 'homelands') for the indigenous people. The apartheid regime paid little attention to the provision of education for the majority of black Namibians, especially the nomadic groups, such as the Himba and Zemba.

During the apartheid regime schools served the political aspirations of South African ideology, in what Althusser (1972), Bowles and Gintis (1976) state was designed to:

- Reproduce the privileges of the ruling class.
- Reproduce the skills and attitudes required for maintaining a (colonial) society.
- Serve as an instrument of oppression.

The colonial state in Namibia dictated the purposes of the educational system as democracy was non-existent, and the colonial government legislated greater inequalities between races and ethnic groups. Not only were racially segregated schools established, but education was further fragmented along tribal lines for schools all over the country. In addition, different educational systems and administrations were developed, based on race. Whites, blacks and coloureds all had separate schools administered by racially based Education Departments/Authorities. Whites received a 'superior education', while blacks received the most inferior education. Coloured education was better than that of blacks, but inferior to that of the white Namibians.

Cognisance should be given to the fact that separate education systems were no coincidence but a deliberate attempt to consolidate apartheid policies in the territory. It is obvious that the white ruling class worked to preserve their privileges and to transmit those skills and attitudes required for maintaining the status quo. To further strengthen the apartheid states machinery, only a few, ill-equipped, poorly staffed and financed schools were made available for indigenous peoples. Insufficient school facilities meant that the majority of the black population had to stay out of school or compete for the few places in their designated schools.

It also meant that only a small number of black children proceeded to secondary and tertiary education levels. The majority of children did not finish their basic formal education, while of the handful of them that did, most had unsatisfactory results to qualify for tertiary institutions. These deliberately engineered mechanisms enabled the colonisers to rationalise separate and unequal education systems to which the oppressed were submitted (Althusser, 1972; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The nature of the apartheid education systems did not allow the majority of blacks access to what Bourdieu *et al.* (1977) refer to as the 'cultural capital', nor did it enable them to get a place in the structure of distributing it. Those who had the 'cultural capital' (i.e. the whites) had the power to make rules and to appropriate the cultural capital.

Prior to independence, the Namibian government inherited 11 semi-autonomous political entities with the responsibilities of 11 Educational Authorities. This was a matter of grave concern to the new government of Namibia. The Bantustans were:

- Basterland
- Bushmanland
- Damaraland
- East Caprivi
- Hereroland
- Kaokoland
- Kavangoland
- Namaland
- Ovamboland
- Tswanaland
- Blanke Administrasie

Not all of these 'Bantustans' had their own educational authorities, and the education for whites and coloureds was also separately administered. As stated earlier, the distribution of education resources was divisive and institutionalised along racial, regional and ethnic lines to serve the hegemonic aims and objectives of the apartheid regime (MEC, 1993). ). Education was compulsory for the whites between the ages of

seven and 17, and this was not the case for blacks. Inequalities in terms of physical facilities, learning materials and human resources were found between and within those 11 racially based education authorities.

Furthermore, prior to independence, the education system in Namibia was generally influenced and shaped by its geography, population, socio-economic and political experience. Redressing these imbalances, the new government of Namibia undertook a comprehensive education reform aimed at providing quality education to all its citizens. The fragmented education system was consolidated into one national education system. 'Education for All' was enshrined in the Namibian Constitution with the main objective of redressing the past by providing equal education opportunities to all those who were previously denied it. This included the expansion of basic education to marginalized children from the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups who had previously been denied an education due to their traditional and cultural diversity, poverty, distance to school, and the negative attitudes of others.

### **6.3. Education provision in independent Namibia**

At independence, the apartheid education system was replaced by a new inclusive education system where equity and quality education for all became the cornerstone. A single Ministry of Education was created that replaced the 11 separate education authorities. These changes resulted in the multi-ethnicity that can be seen in the country's classrooms today. There are visible signs of improvement in classrooms today, and there is compulsory schooling up to the age of 16, or up to the end of grade 10.

Namibia has been able to improve substantially; more schools have been established, new classrooms have been built or added at existing schools, schools have been renovated or expanded, and the number of qualified primary teachers has increased from 30% to 75%. The enrolment rate has increased from 545,000 in 2002 to 577,000 in 2008; an average of 13% growth per year. In 2008, more than 90% of the Namibian school age children were attending school. The Ondaio Mobile school repetition rates rose on average from 12% between 2005 to 16% for 2008. All in all, Namibia has managed to improve its Education for All Development Index (EDI), as provided by UNESCO (2009) by more than 5% since 1999.

Like other countries, Namibia recognized the importance of the attainment of both Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The Dakar Framework for Action, specifically emphasises that:

*‘... education systems around the world have to be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners’(MDGs 2000).*

It has made it very clear that providing education to nomadic communities is one of the most challenging and urgent issues currently facing education policy makers, practitioners, donors and other stakeholders if the EFA and MDG are to be achieved by 2015.

#### **6.4. Education provision for Himba and Zemba people**

The Education for All (EFA) movement and the education targets within the MDG have provided an impetus for many African countries, including Namibia, to drive for Universal Primary Education (UPE). The World Declaration on Education For All (1990) drew attention to removing educational disparities within countries. The needs of particular groups were highlighted, and nomads and pastoralists were specifically mentioned (ibid. Article 3). The World Declaration also encouraged ‘learning through a variety of delivery systems’ and the adoption of ‘supplementary alternative programmes’ (ibid. Article 5). You may say the Namibian education policies are influenced, in some aspects more than from others, by such international agendas.

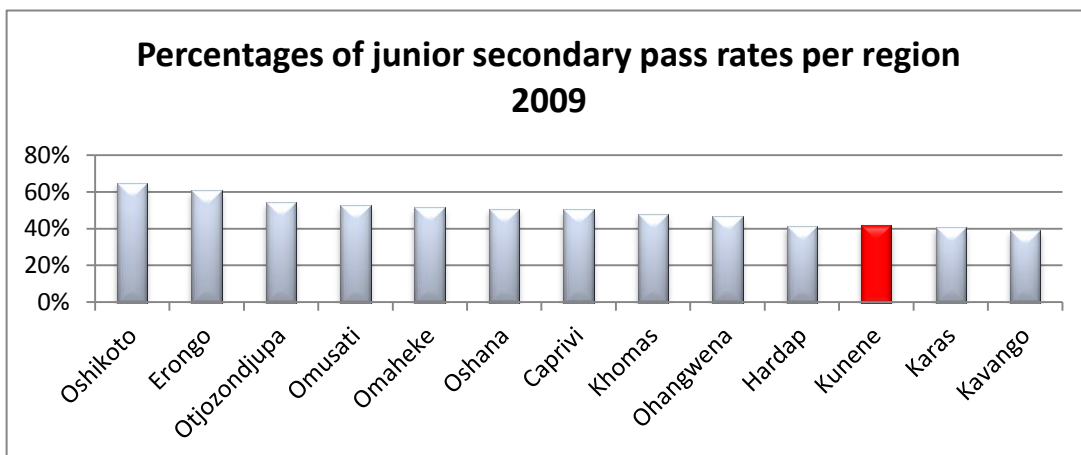
In reaffirming Article 26 of the United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, that ‘everyone has the right to education,’ in 1996, six years after independence, the Namibia Government, the Ministry of Education in particular, approached the Office of Norway Ambassador (Mr. Bernt H. Lund) to undertake a desk study, together with Kunene Regional Education Officials.

The primary objective of the desk study was to find the best ways in which education could be provided to children from the Himba, Zemba and other semi-nomadic communities residing in the north west of Namibia. The desk study was conducted and recommended the introduction of a mobile school concept in the Kunene region. In

1997, a field study was conducted by the late Hans Hvidsten, the first Namibian Association of Norway (NAMAS expatriate) and Mr Tjinezuma Kavari, a school teacher from a nomadic group, to validate the mobile school concept recommended by the 1996 desk study preliminary report. They visited various nomadic communities across Kunene region to discuss the best way of bring in formal education to the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic communities in the north west and south of the Kunene region without interfering too much in the family clan’s income production mode. The field study focused on what the Himba and Zemba communities wanted, rather than on what outsiders thought they would need.

The 1997 field study revealed that there were between 150 to 160 clans in the north west of Opuwo, with a total of almost 1 300 households with more than 16 000 people. At the time of the field study it was estimated that there were more than 4 000 primary school age children from nomadic communities, of which only about 1 000 were attending school regularly. The study also estimated that there were almost 4 000 children below the age of six. Another aspect of education in the region worth mentioning was that the quality of education being offered, especially in the Kunene region, was below standard. Since independence, for example, national examination results for grades 10 and 12 showed that the region was amongst the regions that did not perform well (Hans & Kavari, 1997). To complete the picture, more than 65% of the adults in the Kunene region were illiterate, as recorded by the 2001 population Census (2001 National Population and Housing Census).

**Figure 6.1 Percentages of Junior Secondary examination results per region 2009**



Source: EMIS 2009, table 36



After parents had been briefed on the importance of formal education for their children, they began to develop an interest in education, and many communities indicated that they wanted schools for their children, and thus were placed on the waiting list. The solution was found in the creation of mobile school units, funded jointly by Norway as part of the NAMAS project and the Government of Republic of Namibia (teacher salaries and benefits).

**Figure 6.2 Mobile school unit: tented classrooms**



This mobile schooling concept was welcomed by the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic communities as it seemed to fit their way of life. The mobile school concept entailed the creation of a tented classroom that could be dismantled to follow the communities when they moved to the next point or location.

The advantage of the mobile school system was that it created provided schooling for children from nomadic communities while they could continue to assist with domestic activities at home. The mobile school schedule does not conflict with herding responsibilities as they are located near their home, and thus the children could preserve their culture.

In addition, the mobile school programme was developed to provide the Himba and Zemba children with valuable educational opportunities to enable them to deal with the pressures of a fast changing world and to take advantage of modern technology and services (Ndjoze-Ojo *et al.*, 2002).



The field study findings revealed that the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups sought education for their children, but they continued to resist the idea of separation from their children, especially at an early age. As indicated in the previous chapter, the people had a nomadic lifestyle and moved collectively with their children and livestock from one area to another in search of better grazing and water. The children are thus part of the family and contribute to their economy.

## **6.5. The organisation and administration of mobile schools**

To implement the mobile school programme, an agreement was reached between the Himba, Zemba and other nomad groups that children would assist their parents in the morning and go to school in the midday and/or afternoon, or whatever arrangement was made between the mobile school teacher and parents. Furthermore, special and adequate inducements were provided to teachers in rural areas to make them stay in the job. The programme has three broad goals: raising the living standards of the rural communities; harnessing the potential of the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups; and bridging the literacy gap between the nomadic peoples and rest of the Namibian society.

The 1997 field study advocated that the mobile school curriculum should be developed and adapted to the needs of the Himba and Zemba communities. The Ministry of Education however, insisted that the national curriculum would be followed to enable children from nomadic communities to continue with their education in any conventional government school after completing Grade 4 in the mobile school unit. The 1992 language policy stipulated that the first three years of teaching should be in the mother tongue (Ministry of Basic Education, 1993). In the case of the mobile school units, the Otjiherero language is used.

The mobile education concept was to meet the needs of nomadic parents and their children by bringing basic education into their own environment. In a society that moves with their livestock, and where all members of the family or clan are needed to secure a good living, you cannot separate the children without disturbing the whole family economy and the community structure. Traditionally, every member of the household has an important role to play in the family economy from a very early age on (see Chapter 5). The family group can often not afford to 'loose' any member without disrupting the total economy of the family. A child 'lost,' because of school, means that

the chores of that child must be performed by some other member of the family and thus there is less production (in economic terms) for the whole family or clan unit.

After almost two years of discussions and negotiations with the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic parents and community leaders about the mobile concept and its delivery mode, they finally agreed and accepted the concept and were willing to reorganise their lives so that children could get time for schooling while still fulfilling their economic activities. The principle that was served by such an agreement was that education is a fundamental right and that the Himba and Zemba children ought to get an education without having to be uprooted from their environment and culture. What is also important to realise is that the ideal of education for all forced the Namibian government to reconsider what constitutes a school. The Namibian government started to recognize that a school is about teaching and learning – it is about the teacher and the content to be conveyed to children. A school cannot be conceived as a physical infrastructure removed from the community it is intended to serve.

The Ondao mobile programme was based on the notion that the provision of education could be done differently. The overall aim and objective of the programme were to provide access to education for the nomadic communities in the Kunene region. Mobile schools units were conceptualised as temporary tent structures that could bring education to children without estranging them from their cultural roots or practices, and which could follow the community as they moved from one place to another in search of pasture for their herds. It was argued that if tented classrooms were used, they could be assembled or disassembled in less than half day and carried by one 4x4 vehicle to a new temporary location. A whole classroom and its furniture could be loaded in one 4x4 vehicle, or hauled by four donkeys to any new location. A typical mobile unit consists of one to four tented classrooms, each with space for 20-25 children with folded chairs and tables.

**Figure 6.3 Inside the tent classroom**



In 1998, the first six mobile school units were established, and by 2010, the number had increased to 45 mobile school units in operation across the north west and south Kunene region. The main target group for the Ondao Mobile Schools were children from the Himba and Zemba communities, who are among the least educated groups in Namibia. Access to these schools is not restricted and any child can enrol in a mobile school.

The mobile education concept was thus based on the notion of bringing the school to the children, rather than on removing the children from their families to attend remote schools. The way schools are traditionally organised are to start at around eight in the morning and go on until sometime around midday. This arrangement, however, does not fit very well with the day of the pastoralist child and the parents. Domestic duties and chores, such as to taking the cattle or goats to water points and then to pastures, must be performed in the early morning every day, thus making it essential that school day start later. But these tasks may require a child to spend the whole day with the flocks that must be herded.

The question to be answered then is, who will go to school when they have such important tasks to perform on a daily basis? The mobile school concept was trying to approach things differently in an effort to accommodate the needs of the children by organising the school day around the children's daily lives. The children come to school when they have time to do so, and after they have performed their tasks; not when the school has time for them. From the research it emerged that very often the chores to be performed place such a demand on the children that parents have resorted to a type of rotation system. The researcher encountered many examples where Himba and Zemba parents have approached the formal education strategically in that they only send one or two children to school and hold the back others for herding; the main economic income of each clan.

Furthermore, the study found that nomadic parents prefer to have a flexible education system that takes into account their children's work in the homestead and the time needed for homestead chores. Others prefer schools or mobile schools either to follow them, or be based close to their homestead (Onganda). They also prefer to have teachers who understood the nomadic way of life and culture.

The mobile school concept was an innovative idea; however, the notion does not work in every practical situation. Through the implementation of the mobile school programme it was found that during the dry season family units in most cases move in different directions, making it impossible for the mobile school unit to follow any specific group. This is because it is common knowledge that not all community members are willing to move in the same direction, due to the scarcity of grazing. For example, during the field study, one of the mobile school units visited had to move as the community had started to move to different locations. During the last weeks, the enrolment number in the unit dropped significantly, from more than 50 to as few as 12 learners attending school. This was a direct result of the family units migrating in search of better grazing for their livestock. In the end the teacher was informed by the last of the family clans that they were moving some 10 kilometres to the east and that they would fetch her, her possessions and some of the school resources soon, using donkeys. But they had to leave the tent and maize meal bags behind as they were too heavy to transport with donkeys.

The new place where the family was moving had no water. They (and the children in particular) were expected to walk 20 kilometres with their animals every day to the water source at their original place.

This is one of example that, in practice, the concept of moving the tent to follow the community does not work, due to migration patterns and environmental conditions. According to the teacher, she had to find a tree in the new location under which she could teach the learners for at least the next six months.

## **6.6. The NAMAS Era**

During the time of NAMAS (Namibia Association of Norway) financial assistance, each unit was provided with tents for classrooms, teacher's accommodation, storage, and furniture which could be easily moved from one place to another. Teachers were recruited from the area, and were given training with the assistance of National Institute for Education Development (NIED), and teaching aids and books were developed. Since the language does not differ much from Otjiherero, this was not a problem, but culturally appropriate reference material was developed and included.

The Ondao Mobile School programme successfully managed to recruit local teachers and deploy them to the various units. During the NAMAS era, the programme was provided with four 4x4 vehicles, and funds for maintenance and fuel. NAMAS also provided the mobile school programme with additional equipment and tents to be used for accommodation by teachers and learners when necessary. The Management of Ondao School used to visit the mobile school units on a weekly basis to support and supervise the mobile school teachers. The tents, furniture and solar panels for lighting were also provided, and the teachers were generally from the area and well integrated into local society with a good understanding of traditional life.

However, some communities were dissatisfied with tent classrooms which they did not regard as proper, permanent school buildings. The majority of the mobile school units lacked a proper water supply, resulting in much being wasted fetching water. During the field study, it was observed that due to the lack of clean water at the mobile school units, children spend much time walking every morning and afternoon to fetch water from wells and boreholes. The quality of the water in most of the wells is not suitable for human consumption.

During the NAMAS era the mobile school was administered by a team of four professional staff members led by a principal and three heads of departments, each covering a geographical area. NAMAS provided the services of a Technical Adviser,

who was based in Opuwo. During the NAMAS Era, the Ondao Mobile School enrolment rates were 2 976 learners in 2005, compared with 1 900 learners in 2010, although these numbers were affected by seasonal demands for herding labour.

**Table 6.1 Ondao Mobile School enrolment rates**

	2005	2009	2010
Enrolment rates in the Kunene region	88%	97%	95%
Enrolment rate for Ondao Mobile Schools	84%	89%	85%
Repetition rates in Ondao Mobile Schools	12%	10%	16%

**Source:** EMIS 2009

This demonstrates that the mobile school enrolment rates have dropped considerably after the Ministry took over (2009). The way the Ondao Mobile Schools were run and managed during the NAMAS era differed substantially from the way in which other schools in Namibia were run and managed. When the Department of Education took over the administration and management of these schools they were poorly prepared for the challenges of running a mobile school programme. Where decisions regarding the staffing and running of the mobile schools were previously taken by NAMAS at the Ondao Mobile School head office, and these decisions now had to be taken by the administrative management structures of the Department; resulting in delays. Even the four 4X4 vehicles were no longer part of the project, and were taken over by the Department of Works, leaving the management staff of the mobile schools without the required means to regularly visit the mobile units.

Apart from the management challenges, another major contributing factor to the low enrolment numbers indicated in Table 6.1 is the incomplete primary phase, as more than 90% of the Ondao Mobile School units only offered grades 1 to 4. As a result, not all nomadic children continue with their upper primary or secondary schooling, which mainly is offered in towns away from where the children reside. As a result, 50% of these learners drop out, while handfuls opt to repeat grades which they have already passed.



The field study and interviews showed that parents and the community in general recognise the importance of formal education, and that this has increased among the Himba and Zemba communities in Namibia. In all the villages visited it was observed that the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups were genuinely interested in the formal education for both children and the adults. Today the majority of Himba, Zemba and other ethnic groups appear enthusiastic about the mobile school programme. They do not feel threatened by formal education and have been brought around to appreciate its benefits and the need for literacy and numeracy skills in a fast changing world. The Himba and Zemba's attitudes towards formal education are positive, seeing that the Ondao mobile school does not charge a school development fund (SDF), operates in vernacular languages, does not require children to wear uniforms, uses local teachers, and is situated locally. This makes many Himba and Zemba and other nomadic groups feel more comfortable with the education offered by the mobile school units. The mobile school has been regarded as an important contribution to the improvement of social life of these indigenous and ancient peoples of Namibia.

There is also evidence that since the establishment of mobile schools in 1998, as much as 50% of school age children from nomadic communities in the Kunene region have now enrolled in the mobile school units, and half of these children are attending school on a regular basis. The programme gives children from marginalised communities an opportunity to receive basic education in their own environment. Children from the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups now can read and write their mother tongues, as well as English. It was found that Himba and Zemba parents have positive expectations and aspirations about the education provided to their children. In the interviews held with parents they often said that they want their children to be educated and come back and build modern houses, buy more livestock, and have a better understanding of modern farming methods. Himba and Zemba parents, as well as their children, are fully convinced that this alternative form of formal education will bring their children up to the same academic standards as other groups so that they can participate on an equal footing in the modern world.

The Ondao Mobile School also represents a major social achievement in locating over 70 educated persons (i.e. mobile school teachers) in 45 remote villages over a period of 12 years. At the beginning of the mobile school programme, the teachers/facilitators were appointed from the community, trained briefly in subject content and teaching methodology, and then appointed to teach in a mobile school. The teacher was periodically given additional training and helped to teach different grades. On the basis



of this, there had been some measure of success in terms of providing teachers, as the aim of the NAMAS (in collaboration with the Namibian Ministry of Education) was to recruit teachers from within the nomadic communities who had completed grade 10 or 12 for teacher training.

From interviews held with administrators and school management personnel, it became evident that the mobile school teachers have a huge impact in making the system more appealing to nomads like the Himba and Zemba, that their influence is more persuasive, and their transformation work for nomad pastoral communities more effective than other methods. Mobile school teachers have acted as important role models for communities and for learners who see for themselves what an educated Himba and Zemba person can achieve, and these teachers, because of their education, often become community leaders as well as role models. Due to their access to transport and outside contacts, they play an important catalytic role in local societies which, until now, have been totally isolated.

Mobile school teachers from the Ondao Mobile School, apart from educating children, can help local communities in contacting government departments and in negotiating for government services. This is a very important impact of the mobile school programme. However, the mobile school programme is not without shortcomings; for example, mobile school teachers' motivation appears to be low – harsh living conditions, erratically paid salaries, social isolation, and a lack of teaching materials all present barriers to effective teaching.

The school feeding programme at all mobile units also seems to be of great importance to children and parents, and has created a positive image among these communities towards formal schooling. The researcher observed that although children from these communities are used to meat and milk products, there were plenty complaints from the Himba and Zemba children that they would prefer something more than the maize porridge. From the observations made during the study, it appears that due to poverty among the Himba, Zemba and nomadic communities, children come to school because of the food, rather than for the sake of being educated.

The researcher, however, observed that the Himba and Zemba people continue to value their herding of animal more than formal education, and as a result they are likely to send their daughters to school rather than their sons, as boys who are normally involved

with herding. Furthermore, it was observed that wealthy Himbas or Zembas are more likely to keep their children away from schools than those who have smaller herds because the wealthy parents need more children to look after the herds.

## **6.7. Ondao mobile school under the Ministry of Education**

From its inception, NAMAS financially supported mobile schools, but this arrangement came to an end in 2008. In part this was the result of Namibia being classified as a middle income country. The Namibian government took over full responsibility for the mobile school programme, including maintenance of existing mobile school units (tents), the supply of new furniture or repairs, and the supply of teaching and learning support materials. Since the takeover the Namibian Ministry of Education has tried to integrate mobile school units into the national education system in terms of administration and operational aspects.

This endeavour poses multiple challenges to the Namibian education system because the mobile school programme served a population with different needs. The mobile schools' education delivery mode, approach and operation are totally different from those of conventional schools. Conventional schools in Namibia are permanent structures with a school principal, heads of departments and teachers; all accommodated in a single building. A number of schools are clustered into a district with an inspectorate and various administrative support structures. The mobile school is a loose collection of tented classrooms spread over a vast territory and managed by a school principal and heads of departments housed in offices removed from the day-to-day activities of the teachers posted at the remote mobile classrooms. The typical frequent contact between school management, teachers and learners is non-existent in this arrangement, and it is highly likely that the school principal may never (or at best very seldom) interact with the learners in his school.

From the interviews conducted with education officials and district and school management personnel, it became evident that the Ministry had not conducted a needs assessment or made sufficient arrangements for the costs incurred by the mobile schools in the same manner as when they were run and administrated with donor funds. However, officials interviewed concede that some of these cost factors (like the provision of vehicles) are integral to the success of the programme. The availability of vehicles in good condition to enable officials to visit the mobile units regularly, were

frequently cited as a key to the success of the school. Another factor mentioned in the interviews was the availability of radio communication at each unit to communicate with the Ondao Mobile School office. The researcher identified numerous challenges in teaching and these factors were part of the decline in quality of education in almost all the visited mobile school units since the takeover as the state had tried to convert the mobile school units to regular schools.

In the past, for example, there was a decision-making structure (in the form of a Steering Committee) that expedited decisions regarding the management of the units (e.g. the appointment of teachers, opening of new mobile units, and the moving and closing of units). After the Ministry took over the mobile school programme, especially the provision of funding, management have been subjected to the same procedures applicable to conventional schools, resulting in the delay of essential services for the mobile school units. At the time of this field study, the Namibian Ministry of Education had no guidelines or funding formulae for the mobile school programme, and professional support was limited towards 'creating an enabling environment'.

The researcher observed that without an understanding of the unique and distinctive characteristics of these mobile school units they may dwindle and/or disappear, leaving the children of the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups without formal education. Apart from the positive impact of the mobile school programme under the NAMAS funding arrangement, some parents are thinking of discontinuing sending their children to mobile school units because of the poor services being offered.

The interviews conducted with the Ondao Mobile School Management, parents, and communities leaders revealed that the drawback of the takeover of Ondao Mobile School programme was caused by an unplanned and uncoordinated takeover. For example, apart from teachers' salaries, the development expenditure of the mobile school programme was not carefully planned to determine the proper use in provision of appropriate classrooms and other necessary conditions needed to facilitate a good learning and teaching environment.

The financial burden has forced some mobile school units to operate in the open space, or under trees. While learning in unroofed or partially-roofed space may be possible during dry days, teaching under such conditions is impossible during the rainy season. Floods, muddy terrain, leaking roofs, and inaccessible roads have resulted in the loss of

school days. Furthermore, the progress of provisioning education among Himba, Zemba and other nomad groups has been curtailed by the non-existence of roads in the Kunene region; especially in the remote areas where the majority of people reside.

Inadequate funding of the Ondao Mobile School led to a precarious decline of enrolment rates, and a high number of teachers left the mobile school units, resulting in the subsequent closure of some mobile school units. During the field study, some mobile school units were found closed for various reasons: no teacher, no food, or no tents for classrooms. In some cases, the Ondao Mobile School's management and mobile teachers have had no choice but to close the mobile school units' temporarily, ordering teachers to go on extended vacations because the classrooms are inhabitable. This trend discouraged some of the Himba and Zemba pastoralists from sending their children to school as conditions were appalling, and they doubted the system anyway.

The mobility and distribution of the Himba and Zemba population are the foremost obstacles limiting children's attendance in school. The low population density makes it difficult to gather enough pupils to make it cost-effective. If facilities (such as tent classes) are provided to such a sparse population, the costs per pupil are far higher than schools in towns and settled villages. Getting children to school is one thing, but keeping them in school and making sure that they learn and complete primary schooling cycle is another.

In 1996, the Namibia government with the assistance of UNICEF introduced a school feeding programme in primary schools serving poor, marginalised and nomadic groups. The aim was not only to contribute to the improvement of the education service delivery, but also to the reduction of malnutrition among school age children. At the time of this study (2010), the Namibian school feeding programme covered more than of 1 300 schools (including 45 mobile school units); benefiting about 230 000 learners (including 2 105 nomadic learners in the Kunene region). This feeding programme scheme enables nomads and pastoralist parents to send their children to school and keep them there on a regular basis. School feeding programmes act as a form of food security, and it is a strategy that contributes to attaining the MDG targets of 2015 and Namibia's national vision 2030.

Offering meals at school is an effective way to encourage children who are poor and chronically hungry to attend classes. The researcher found that the school feeding programme has a positive impact on school participation in the mobile school units. The programme disproportionately benefits nomadic Himba and Zemba children by creating incentives to enrol them in school, and thus their attentiveness and capacity to learn improves.

School feeding programmes throughout the world have successfully attracted and retained children to school, especially those from poor, marginalized and nomadic pastoralist communities (Adelman *et al.*, 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2001). The International Food Policy Research Institute (2001:3) asserts that 'hunger and chronic malnutrition reduce learning achievement of children already in school', and this evidence led them to conclude that:

Hunger is a barrier to learning. A hungry child cannot concentrate and perform. Hungry children are unlikely to stay in school. School-based feeding programs have proven effective in encouraging enrolment, increasing attention spans, and improving attendance at school.

According to the World Food Programme, case studies in developing countries have documented strong improvements in enrolment and attendance when learners receive meals at school in return for good school attendance (Delman, Gilligan & Lehrer, 2008). According to Delman *et al.* (2008), without breakfast, learners are more easily distracted in the classroom and have problems staying alert and concentrating on lessons. Numerous studies suggest that hunger affects cognitive functions and may therefore impair a child's ability to benefit from schooling (Delman *et al.*, 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2001).

Abundant research, supported by the researcher's own field study, shows that school feeding programmes have a positive direct impact on mobile school enrolment rates, and cause a significant increase in learning concentration, as measured by improvements in the promotion rates in the mobile school units.

## 6.8. Physical services

When it comes to physical resources, a number of shortcomings have been identified in the research, and the following are the most common:

### 6.8.1 *National curriculum*

The need to guarantee nomadic children a formal education in the same subject areas and quality as other school children in the country receive has to be weighed with a concern for its relevance. Making national curricula relevant to groups other than those they were historically designed for (and by) is not, or will not, be achieved simply by adding 'relevant' topics (from the same centralized perspective). Some studies (Kratli, 2001; Althusser, 1972) note that the curriculum becomes 'relevant' to pastoralist children by tackling the foundation subjects from the perspective of pastoralists' daily reality and pre-existing knowledge, as constructed by pastoralists themselves.

From the nomads' perspective, relevance cannot be achieved at a central level and cannot be permanent (Kratli, 2001). It is crucial to build capacity (to meet these requirements) within all the institutions concerned with pastoralism and education (at all levels). The institutional understanding of pastoralism needs to go beyond the pastoralist-as-a-lifestyle perspective and needs to come to terms with the reality of pastoralism as a productive force.

During the field study, the researcher noted that some Himba and Zemba parents have reservations about the use of the national curriculum in the mobile school units. Some stated that the curriculum content conveys certain underlying values and ideas that may not be overtly expressed or accepted in our culture. They feel that these underlying values are not always compatible with their culture and traditions. As one of the headman put it:

We want our children to be educated and that is why we send them to school, however, our big concern is that when they come back home their attitude and behaviour towards their parents and elderly people in the community are objectionable. They do not respect their parents or elders any more. They show contempt for our traditional ways of living, and this is not good.

During the field study, it was observed that nomadic communities' views and expectations of formal education and schooling vary according to specific communities and circumstances. Some parents acknowledged that proficiency in English and basic knowledge gained from formal schooling are probably essential if employment is to be sought outside the pastoral community. Nevertheless, they consider formal schooling in its present form a waste of time. This mixture of feelings was observed and encountered many times during the field study, where nomadic parents have approached the formal education strategically by sending only one or two of their children to school as a possible avenue for ensuring an economically independent future for the clan.

Another common worry from the Himba and Zemba parents in almost all of the visited mobile school units is that the children grow up without formal or modern education, but they do receive a traditional education oriented to their way of making a living, and one which contains the cultural and societal values of their society. For example, herd boys learn the value of different kinds of grazing for each species of stock by watching animals and the environment and through the direct teaching by male elders, while girls acquire a household related education from their mothers and elder sisters.

Such concerns demonstrate that the context of the current national curriculum is incompatible with the Himba and Zemba cultural practices and lifestyle. As Woldemichael (1995) puts it, in most cases, the national curriculum taught in the nomad schools is developed by sedentary people for sedentary people (i.e. urban settlements and semi-settlements), and is often irrelevant to the nomads' experience and concerns. Some mobile school unit teachers interviewed validated Woldemichael's (1995) view by repeatedly stating that there has been a conflict between the nomadic cultures and the current Namibian national curriculum set for all children.

According to the Himba and Zemba people, the curriculum taught in the formal mobile schools is against their beliefs. This can be illustrated by an example found in one of the mobile schools. Against the canvas wall of the tent was a rhyme about a teapot used as part of English language instruction. Although a teapot may be familiar to most societies, it is not a known object in the Himba and Zemba culture - tea is not consumed and the vessel used to serve milk or any other drink is a calabash. For the learners, the rhyme bears no relation to their own world. Another example relates to common geometrical shapes taught to children in Grade 1.



These shapes are not typically known to the indigenous people and words to describe the shapes had to be created. The following are four of these terms that Grade 1 learners need to master:

- Square – *otjipaka*.
- Circle – *otjiputuputu*.
- Triangle – *otjinavikorovitatu*.
- Rectangle – *otjisembatuwo*.

The first two are known as they relate to the shapes of the huts and kraal, but a triangle and a rectangle are not shapes found in the environment in which Himba and Zemba children grow up.

The Himba and Zemba parents also have serious reservations about the contents of the national curriculum as they deem it inappropriate for the children of pastoral nomads. It does not provide practical skills to improve the livelihood of nomads. It is focused more on academic achievements that only suit the needs of urban children. They say there is a lack of demonstrable practical benefits for the pastoral economy. This corresponds with the findings of Gorham (1979). As a result, parents are reluctant to send all their children for formal schooling and they feel it will disconnect them from their nomadic lifestyle. They are also fearful that their offspring will lose their indigenous knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. For example, some parents in Otjirumbu, Okondjombo, and Okapara villages stated very clearly that they have not seen yet a positive return in sending their children to formal schools. They said those children who managed to complete their basic formal education (grade 1-3 or 4) through mobile school units are roaming around in the community and do not possess any meaningful basic knowledge or skills to improve life for the community. This was confirmed during the interviews with mobile school teachers who said that for the Himba and Zemba culture, education is not a priority, like herding. However, experience shows that when the importance of formal education is pointed out, they respond positively.

A parent in the Okapara villages stated the following:

*A western and formal notion of education have and continue to weaken our traditions and our way of life in our communities, and has further contributed to the marginalization and alienation of the Himba and Zemba communities.*

The general views of Himba and Zemba parents are that since those contents of the current national curriculum emphasis literacy, numeracy and national language, in order to integrate nomadic children in the modern culture, it only helps children to migrate out of the pastoral sector, rather than helping them makes better use of their tribal environment. The current national curricula is planned mainly with settled children in mind and designed to lead to higher education. Himba and Zemba parents fear that this present a high risk of children alienation from their traditions, cultures and households if using a teaching and learning approach similar to the urban patterns. Therefore, they are demanding the current content curriculum be revised. Based on this call, it will be advisable to countries where nomads are to be found, like Namibia, that their future nomad curricula be integrated with nomadic and pastoral developmental matters, such as water improvement, veterinary services, and animal husbandry. It is imperative to provide services for nomadic communities like the Himba and Zemba people in the wider context of national development.

Parents strongly believe in the need to retain the strengths of the Himba and Zemba culture as gifts to the modern world, while simultaneously adding knowledge needed for modern survival, without killing the spirit of their old traditions. They acknowledge that this poses a tremendous challenge. In their view this can only be achieved through alternative or complementary forms of education in the Namibian schools, especially in the mobile school units. Such alternatives have to be low-cost, replicable, culturally appropriate, politically non-threatening, and suitable for ethnically mixed group situations. For example, during the researcher's interviews with mobile school teachers, a number of them remarked that there are parts of the curriculum (e.g. on AIDS) that they do not feel comfortable in teaching because in their culture they don't talk about such things to children.

### 6.8.2 *Instructional materials*

During the fieldwork, the researcher was greeted by overwhelming complaints from both parents and mobile school teachers about the scarcity of instructional materials (especially textbooks), learning and support materials, as well as blackboards in the mobile school units. These problems hamper teaching and learning. Some children in mobile school units, for example, are taught how to write in the sand with their fingers. Requests from schools for children to bring learning kits dampen the spirits of parents who think they have already made enough sacrifices in letting their children go to school rather than going herding.

The harshness of the environment also takes its toll on teaching resources that have to be stored in make shift mud-huts or cardboard boxes. They are often damaged by rodents, insects and water that seep through the makeshift roofs. The lack of proper furniture also creates situations where children use the textbooks and other materials to sit in the sand – thus lessening its lifespan.

### 6.8.3 *Teaching spaces/facilities*

During the fieldwork it was observed that facilities such as classrooms, furniture, and other facilities for a conducive learning and teaching environment were grossly inadequate. A number of visited mobile school units do not have tents as they have worn out and could no longer be used, and learning and teaching are taking place outside or under trees (i.e. Otjirumbu and Okapara mobile units at the time of this study). Many of the tents in use are damaged by the wind and the sun, and some of their side panels are missing. The folding chairs in many classes were broken or have been stolen or lost. Children were sitting on the floor or on makeshift seats constructed from the branches of trees. Overall, a serious shortage of adequate provisioning of learning materials was evident.

Furthermore, in the fieldwork, it was observed that the majority of mobile school units do not move any more as parents and households prefer to have their units settled in one place where they know their children are being educated and cared for in a secure environment. At the time of this field study, it was found that Ondao Mobile School management does not have the exact number of units that still move and follow the communities. This information was difficult to obtain and the reasons given were lack of

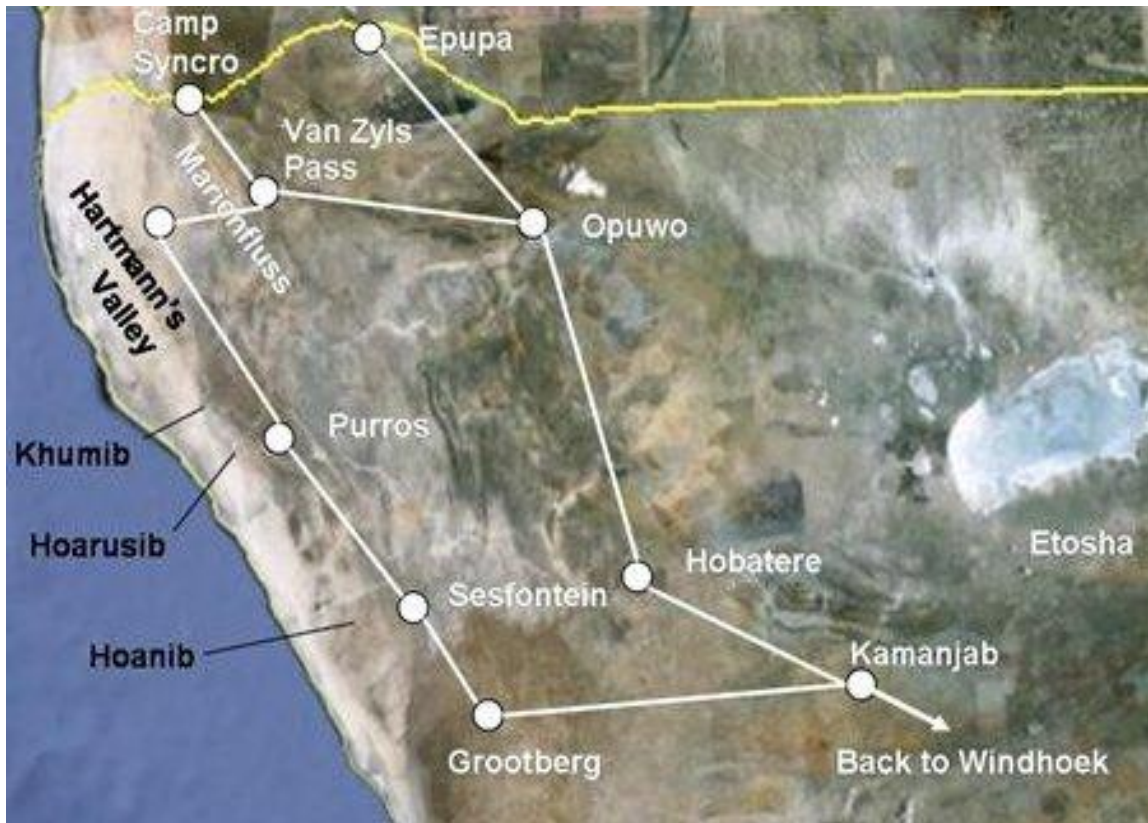
transport, preventing management from visiting the mobile school units. However, according to their data, only about 15 out of 45 mobile school units are still moving around and following the communities. Three out of seven visited mobile school units do move to follow the community.

In terms of accommodation, none of visited mobile school units provided basic and adequate accommodation for learners and teachers. Mobile school teachers stayed in mud huts or tents with no amenities. They have no radio communication or mobile phone contact with the mobile school office in Opuwo. According to the Ondao school principal, 90% of mobile units do not have a mobile signal. In one case during the field study, the teacher had to climb up to the top of a mountain (a 90 minute climb) to get a mobile signal to phone the office and communicate with them. Mobile school teachers seldom have any form of transportation at their disposal. These factors impact directly on the quality of the management of these mobile school units and the moral of the teachers.

#### *6.8.4 Transport*

To grasp the seriousness of the transport problem, it is necessary to see it within the context of the structure of the Ondao mobile school. The school is managed by a school principal, assisted by three Heads of Departments (HoDs) on average, each responsible for 15 mobile school units spread across the entire Kunene region; some being as far as 300km away from the principal's office in Opuwo.

Figure 6.4 Satellite image indicating limited number of roads in the Kunene region



There is no day-to-day contact between a classroom (unit) teacher and the management or other teachers. The only contact is when they are visited by the Head of Departments or principal. Transport is thus one of the challenges faced by the Ondao Mobile School administrators. At the time of the field study there was only one 4x4 vehicle used by the principal and the three Head of Departments (HoDs).

The Ondao Mobile School is experiencing a decline in its enrolment, compared with previous years, especially when the school was funded by NAMAS. The Ondao mobile school office is hundreds of kilometres away from the mobile units, and as a result management do not visit the units regularly to support mobile teachers, learners and parents/communities. Because of this, the quality of the education rendered to these communities is compromised. The Ondao officials (HoDs in particular) start to lose interests in their jobs because they don't have the means to perform their work effectively.

#### 6.8.5 *Teacher provision in mobile schools*

In Namibia, teacher recruitment and allocation is mainly centrally driven, and it appears to be a matter of the equal distribution of qualified teachers among schools. At the time of this study, there were 72 teachers for 45 mobile school units, teaching 2 105 pupils; i.e. a ratio of about 29.2 learners per teacher. A significant percentage of these teachers, lack the requisite teaching qualification as prescribed by the Namibia government; the Basic Education Teaching Diploma (BETD). At the time of this study more than 30% of mobile school teachers were under- or unqualified. Teacher-quality is therefore very low in the mobile school units compared with that of conventional schools (EMIS, 2008).

It was also found that there was a higher teacher turnover in the Ondao Mobile School for a variety of reasons. Most common were the long distances from town and other amenities (i.e. isolation), and the poor conditions in the mobile units which results in qualified teachers transferring to conventional schools. Transport is a contributing factor, as some of the furthest units only open one or two days after the official opening day due to mobile teachers spending up to three days travelling to reach their respective units. Due to these conditions, there is high transfer of qualified mobile teachers to the conventional schools where basic services can be found. The poor conditions and long distances to mobile school units cannot attract a cadre of quality teachers, committed to the educational enrichment of the nomad peoples. This has forced the government to employ unqualified or under-qualified teachers on a contract basis.

#### 6.8.6 *Teacher absenteeism*

The flexible approach taken by the Namibian government to train teachers of the Ondao Mobile School is commendable. However, it was found that with such widely dispersed mobile school units, it is impossible to manage, check or control the physical attendance of all mobile school teachers. During the field study the researcher encountered numerous occasions of teachers' absenteeism and endless excuses for not being present at school, such as being sick, fetching water and fuel, going to Opuwo for training/consultation, and/or collecting their cheques at the office.



However, the impression the researcher gained was that some mobile school units teachers were conscientious and kept their units open as much as possible, and that there was no widespread abuse of this flexible system.

### 6.8.7 *Quality of education*

There is a general acceptance that all learners require high quality teaching to perform well and that teaching quality is determined by teacher qualifications and experience which must be allocated equally between all regions and schools to ensure at least horizontal and vertical equity (UNESCO 2009). As indicated in Chapter 2, horizontal equity relates to the similar provision of both programmes and services to learners, presenting alike learning needs. Vertical equity relates to the diversity of learning needs presented by learners. In other words, the programmes and services provided should be appropriate to the learning needs of the learner and their circumstances.

Developing countries like Namibia, however, are still struggling to ensure an adequate allocation of essential education resources, including human resources for the learners at educational institutions (Rebell, 1998; Fiske *et al.*, 2002; Motala, 2005). With many factors influencing education quality and equity at the school level, teachers are now recognised as the most critical factor for learner achievement. The equitable distribution of teachers, teacher learning, and teacher improvements are becoming the intense focus of researchers, policy makers, programme designers, implementers, and evaluators (ADEA, 2004; ADEA 2005; Anderson, 2002; Boyle *et al.* 2003; Craig *et al.* 1998; Leu *et al.*, 2005; Lewin & Stuart, 2003; UNESCO, 2004; UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF, 2000; USAID, 2002; USAID/EQUIP1, 2004a; USAID/EQUIP2, 2006; Verspoor, 2006; Goe 2006).

Taking the argument further, Hanushek *et al.* (2004), Darling-Hammond (2002), Lankford *et al.* (2002) and Goe (2002) argue that qualified and motivated teachers are indispensable, but this does not guarantee sufficient conditions for good learning outcomes. Therefore, adequate investment in teaching materials and school infrastructure is also required and important.

Hanushek *et al.* (2004), Darling-Hammond (2002), Lankford *et al.* (2002) and Northwest Report (1996, as quoted Mosborg) argue that although there is an overwhelming general agreement that the qualifications of teachers are positively related to learners'



abilities to succeed academically, in their they studies cite that qualifications and experience do not, in every case, correlate with good teaching and learners' good performance. For instance, the Northwest Report (1996, as quoted Mosborg, 1996), cites that there is no link between qualifications and academic performance, neither in regards to expenditure nor learners' performance.

In taking the argument further, Mosborg (1996) argues that the provision of qualified teachers may have been provided, but the question is whether the qualifications and experience actually reach the learners in the form of the opportunities to learn and improve their achievements? Mosborg (1996) further argues that research provides strong evidence, but no definitive answer to the question of how important teacher qualifications are and what makes a teacher effective. In the researcher's view, Mosborg's (1996) claims need to be studied further to explore the effects of qualified and experienced teachers on learners' achievements, as well the definition of 'good teacher and teaching'. Furthermore, there is debate around the globe on what an equal allocation is, and what the most equitable and fair mechanism for distributing resources among communities and schools is.

In Namibia, the effort to address the imbalances in the Namibian education system resulted in what became known as the 2001 Education Act (Act no. 16 of 2001), which replaced the National Education Act (Act no. 30 of 1980), and the 2001 Teaching Staffing Norms Policy in Government schools. The promulgation of these two policies was to bring about equitable distribution of education resources and educators between regions and schools in order to improve equal educational opportunities and improve quality education across the country. This was in an effort to enhance equal educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of their locations, race or socio-economic status.

The 2001 Teaching Staffing Norms policy's primary objective was to unify learner and teacher ratios of one teacher to 35 learners for primary, and one teacher for 30 learners in secondary, at all schools across the country. The aim was to eliminate the inherited imbalances in service delivery by promoting equal education opportunities among regions and schools, particularly to address the issue of inequitable distribution of educators across the country by re-allocating teachers according to teacher: learner norms. It responds to the popular perception among most educators, policy-makers, parents and stakeholders in education (in both developed and developing nations) that smaller classes enhance learning and teaching, even though decades of research have

not succeeded in establishing clear benefits for smaller classes. A general agreement within the literature is that although smaller classes have the potential to enhance learning and teaching, they require additional competent and qualified teachers who are willing to take advantage of smaller classes, as well as adequate physical facilities (Grubb et al., 2002; Rebell, 2006).

Most of the comments from the interviews in this study have cited the wide range of factors outside the control of the quality and equity education in mobile school units. The common factors cited associated with poverty are the varying degrees of mobility, harsh climate and environmental conditions, coupled with drought which cause the communities to move in search of water and better pastures for the livestock. During the visits the researcher observed that the mobile school units were inadequately equipped and under-staffed, with a critical shortage of textbooks, and that the teachers do not seem to have either the capacity or learning support materials to prepare their teaching lessons effectively. As an example, the researcher noted that a Grade 1 teacher had to use an A3 size world map to teach the children about the Kunene region that was not even visible on a map of such scale. This imposes a severe problem on the teaching-learning process rendered in the mobile school units.

Official statistics (EMIS, 2008) shows that the Ondao Mobile School dropout and repetition rates tend to be higher, and the transition rates from one grade to another are lower than the national average of 77.3% (EMIS, 2009: 56). Another factor observed was the rotation system used by parents where children often do not attend school regularly throughout the year but only for part of the year when they are not needed to herd cattle to take care of other domestic chores.

An analysis of the literature reveals that the impact of teacher quality on learning in the classroom cannot be underestimated (Anderson, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Goe, 2002). Mobile school teachers in some cases are frustrated by the lack of classroom aids, which in the official curriculum may appear irrelevant to the needs of nomadic children. Inspectors of Education and Head of Departments visit rarely, and requests for learning and teaching materials often take many months (two to three months) to process and reach to mobile school units. The Ministry of Education, the Regional Office in particular, needs to understand that mobile school teachers need to be provided timeously with adequate resources to deliver instruction effectively. They should be provided with a learning environment suitable to the instructional needs of their learners.

During the field study, it was evident that mobile school teachers were trying to create teaching aids from locally available resources to make education relevant to the needs of the children living a pastoral lifestyle.

One argument regarding the poor quality of education rendered to the Himba, Zemba and other nomad groups is that because formal schooling continues to retain the delivery mode structure used during the colonial era, and this is not suitable for nomadic pastoralists. The formal education system is more hierarchical and takes a formal approach, which makes it difficult to teach children from nomadic communities who are often on the move. Equally, their life-style in terms of low density, varying degrees of mobility, and remoteness makes it difficult to assure quality and equity in education. Developing countries like Namibia, however, in their education policy instruments and implementation, should take into account the uniqueness and different needs of the nomads and the movement of these groups. The education policy instruments should be flexible to accommodate these cultural dimensions and create equal educational opportunities for all children to acquire an education of quality, regardless of the socio-economic-status and geographical location of the community.

## **6.9. Instructional experiences**

### *6.9.1 Multi-grade teaching*

Multi-grade pedagogy has not been systematically adopted in Namibia, though it is occurring in a piece-meal approach across the country as it's a viable and practical option. It is simply a teaching adaptation used by teachers who are particularly innovative. Many countries, including Namibia, have experimented with multi-grade education as a primary strategy to reach the children who are difficult to reach with formal education.

In Namibia, multi-grade teaching is practised in all mobile school units, and the majority of the units normally cater from Grade 1 to 4, and in exceptional cases up to Grade 7. It was observed that the national teacher learner ratio of 1:35 for primary schools is not applied to the mobile units because of the vastness of the Kunene region and the low population density. Also, the children are rotated by parents, resulting in them only receiving education for a part of the year, yet they are reflected on the school register.

In all visited mobile school units their enrolments per grade were very low and as a result they do not qualify to have an additional teacher per grade. This situation forced the Ondao School Management to introduce multi-grade teaching in all mobile school units, although not all teachers (particularly under- and unqualified teachers) can handle it. The decrease of mobile school enrolment over the past two to three years, for example, from 2 255 in 2009 to 2 105 learners in 2010, has also left the Ondao Mobile School Management with no option but to downgrade some of the units to offer only lower grades that a specific teacher can handle. The challenge is that teachers have not been trained on how to teach multi grade teaching, and to make things worse, of the 72 mobile school teachers, 30% are unqualified or under-qualified (no teacher training and a qualification of less than Grade 12). This has a negative impact on quality of education among children from marginalised communities.

In terms of teacher quality and competencies, improvements in teacher qualifications need to be translated into effective teacher quality. Even teachers with formal qualifications still lack competencies that are critical to improve learning. A large number of mobile school teachers have difficulties interpreting and implementing the national curriculum. Many practicing teachers do not have sufficient proficiency in reading skills to enable them to pursue further studies at a diploma level or above. Practicing mobile school teachers are found to have poor reading skills, grammar skills, elicitation techniques, limited vocabulary, and lack the ability to adequately explain concepts.

Clearly, mobile school teachers' poor English proficiency adversely affects instruction, not only in English as a subject, but in all other subjects that are taught in English – the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards. Multi-grade teaching in the mobile units remains a challenge, as the majority of mobile teachers are struggling, teaching learners from different grades in the same class especially teaching lower primary (grade 1, 2, 3, and 4) and upper primary (grade 5, 6, and 7) together. Many mobile school teachers lack the knowledge and skills to manage multi-grade classes effectively as they have been trained in mono-grade teaching pedagogy

Poor mastery of language is not limited to English. Namibia has 13 languages of instruction for Grades 1 to 3, but only one language is taught (Otjiherero) in mobile schools at the lower primary level. The standardization of orthographies and the production of materials are recent phenomena that teachers are still learning. Because of mobile school teachers' language limitations, reading lessons tend to be mechanized verbalization of words, without grasping meaning or content.

Equally, writing exercises are mechanized copying of words. Some mobile school teachers have a limited repertoire of reading instruction methods; they hardly help learners monitor their reading or comprehension. Given their own challenges, they have little ability to diagnose learner reading and writing difficulties, less still to institute appropriate remedial action. Given their difficulties with the languages of instruction, some mobile teachers tend to teach the textbook, rather than the learners, with little if any consideration for competencies as stipulated in the official curriculum. Invariably they do not cover the syllabus, but rather select topics they understand.

National averages of qualified teachers mask intra- and inter-regional disparities in teacher deployment. As with most resources, qualified teachers are inequitably deployed in favour of the urbanized southern regions. In 2009, the proportion of qualified primary teachers ranged from 75% for Kunene, compared with 95% for Khomas. For secondary education, the proportions ranged from 88% for Kunene, compared with 95% percent for Khomas. There are also indications of intra-regional disparities in the allocation of teachers; for example in the Kunene region (EMIS, 2009). It was noted that there is wide variability among mobile units. For instance, units that have lower enrolments per grade for learner/teacher ratios is higher - up to 40 (i.e. Otutati mobile school unit) learners in the class, as they only qualified for one teacher.

### 6.9.2 *Enrolment and dropout rates*

- Enrolment

Access to primary education at the national level remains comparatively high in Namibia. The number of school age children from nomadic groups, however, is relatively low (EMIS, 2008a, 2009b, 2010c). Some of the common reasons regarding the low enrolment rate among the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups were identified during the field study.

First, learner numbers at the mobile school units vary from as few as six learners to as many as 150 learners per unit. The levels of enrolment in nomadic schools are relatively low. According to the 2001 Population Census, more than 25 000 primary school age populations are not attending school in the Kunene region alone, and 70% are nomadic pastoralists. At the time of this study, there were 2 105 learners enrolled in mobile schools, with an average of 47 learners per unit.

Coupled with this was a type of rotation system where parents would send some children to school, while others took care of chores and animals. Another reason for keeping children, or some of them at least, out of school, is the perception of formal education as a process of cultural alienation. Nomads such as Himba and Zemba are well aware of the risk of their cultural alienation in sending their children to school. Some parents stated that they (i.e. the Himba and Zemba view both schools and schooling as alien concepts that do not contribute to their pastoral way life.

Kunene is a large region with a very low population density. Schools are still far away from the majority of people, and transportation is not set up for the communities. Plausibly, parents like the Himba, Zemba and other nomad groups sometimes refuse to send their children to school every day and it is hard to enforce compulsory school attendance in such a big region.

Special challenges occur for the few nomad people left in Namibia, such as the Himba, Zemba and other nomadic groups like the San parents - it is often impossible to send their children to school without sending them away to a boarding school, which many refuse to do.

- Dropout rates

A high dropout rate is one of the challenges facing the Ondao Mobile School system. Nomadic children drop out of school mainly because they have to herd animals as this is the primary source of their livelihood. In most cases, after they complete their higher grades in their respective mobile school units, they do not continue with their education. One of the more common reasons is that when these children have to move to conventional schools, and parents are expected to contribute to a School Development Fund (SDF). This is incompatible with the mobile school programme, and parents resist contributing.

In addition, the challenges is that when children complete their higher grades at their respective units, they demand that their parents to sell some livestock to cover their school fees and school uniforms. This is against their parents' cultural practices and customs. Thirdly, sending children to schools in town removes them from the economic activities of the family, and, fourthly, parents are reluctant to expose them to the negative influences in town schools.

- Other challenges beyond schooling

In any country where nomadic people are to be found they continue to pose challenges to the national and international target of achieving Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015. In Namibia, it poses challenges in terms of providing education to the nomad groups.

The following are some of the common challenges posed by the mobile school programme on the Namibian education system since its implementation:

- Culture demand and formal education

Albeit the widespread acceptance within the Himba and Zemba communities that formal education is important and needed, some parents, however, continue to express dissatisfaction with many aspects of the formal education concept. They feel threatened when children have to go far away from the community for education and stay without any parental care. It has been observed that in some cases, there is a resistance from parents who argue that losing the labour of their children is a great enough economic sacrifice to make.

Parents feel formal education is denying them the assistance of the children, especially when they are needed to help with chores and tend animals – the source of the communities' livelihood. The majority of parents interviewed expressed the view that, 'they strongly believe in their cattle' but they take cognizance of the importance of education. However, they have to balance the two. As one parent put it, 'If we allow all our children to go every day to school, our cattle will die of hunger and get lost.'

Questions on culture were posed to both nomadic learners and mobile school teachers, such as, 'Tell me about some of the cultural practices and customs that may have an influence on their teaching and learning'. Responses were similar to those of the parents, in that they believe schools are centres of bad behaviour. As one nomadic learner put it:

*Our parents fear that our culture and religion might be eroded if they allow us to attend schooling.*



This was echoed by number of nomadic learners at most of the visited mobile school units. Himba and Zemba parents, in some cases, were adamant in taking their daughters out of school to preserve their culture.

One nomadic learner added:

*[There is] Ignorance of our parents about the importance and value of education, and they take animals as their main source and value animals more. Equally, our parents have doubts about the importance of education, since nomadic life is their only way of their life.*

From the interviews, repeated concern was raised by mobile school teachers that some nomadic parents believe that education reduces their labour and livestock resources. Labour is lost when children go to school to learn, and parents are aware that school comes with expenses which they have to bear by selling some of their animals or getting someone to look after their livestock and paying him/her.

- Cultural alienation

Such remarks sum up the traditional values the Himba and Zemba parents are concerned about. The attitudes of the children who go to school and graduate with ideas are at odds with traditional pastoral practices. These parents further express their fear by stating that the mobile school teachers, instead of teaching pastoral procedures, spend too much time on teaching the history and culture of societies the pastoralists do not want to know about.

Similar views are found by the study conducted by Jama (1993), funded by UNICEF, in Somalia on education provision to nomads. Nomads in Somalia view both schools and schooling as alien concepts that do not contribute to the pastoral way of life. They believe that such facilities will, in the end, alienate their children from them and society large (Jama, 1993).

The alienating dimension of schooling is not mitigated by an approach focusing on curriculum relevance, as is the case of Namibia. Even in a responsive approach, school education is seen as ultimately meant to equip children to leave their communities.

Equipping children with new knowledge can be perceived as disempowering the parents and limiting their ability to provide critical skills and knowledge which their children will need to survive in the type of life that they were born into. Some parents do take the risk of sending their children to school due to the prospect of high rewards in terms of income or status. However, they normally try to minimise this risk by carefully selecting who should go to school and who stays to look after the livestock. In most cases, the first-born son is normally kept out of school because this is the person destined to preserve ritual continuity and the future management of the clan.

- Child labour

According to International Labour Organization (2002), children constitute part of the labour force virtually worldwide. Their involvement in household work is a common phenomenon in all levels of livelihood security in nomadic societies, in particular. Children's involvement in the household division of labour is negatively referred to as 'child labour' and represents a situation that deprives children of their fundamental rights to education (United Nations Human Rights 1948). Although children's work is presented in negative terms within the mainstream literature, in the nomadic communities like the Himba and Zemba, household work often appears to be perceived by the children as a positive experience, and by their parents as a process of crucial education value.

Children's work is perceived as a process of socialization, progressively initiating children into work and transmitting skills that will enable them to support themselves and their parents and contribute to their communities (Kratli, 2001:38).

Leaving a child without knowing basic household work is considered by the nomads, in the African context, as a sign of parental negligence. 'Only parents who did not have their children's best interests at heart would let them grow up without work responsibilities' (Kratli, 2001:93, as quoted by Save the Children Fund, 2000).

- Mobility of community

Unscheduled movements and migration of the Himba and Zemba communities makes educational planning difficult in the Kunene region, and in the country as a whole. The poor planning and under-funding of nomadic education is partly blamed on inaccurate demographic data. The lack of authentic data or reliable statistics on the nomads leads to planning based on guesswork. In one of the mobile school units visited, it was found that about half the children who had attended the school in the previous season had moved with their parents.

Many attribute such erratic attendance and low enrolment in school to habitual movement. More than 70% of the mobile teachers interviewed affirmed that unscheduled movements have an effect on the children's performance. As a result of these movements, the mobile school teachers face the extra task of adjusting their teaching to fit the dynamics of the transient population.

One of the important observations was that learners are just as important as the teachers in facilitating quality teaching and learning. However, due to the sparsely populated nature of the region, up to 80% the children start school very late, as has been confirmed by the age of children enrolled in the first grade in mobile school units. The inequitable access to primary education for nomadic children means that they often enter primary school less ready than their counterparts from more affluent homes. These disadvantages do not augur well for a country that aspires to the notion of Education for All by 2015.

The research also found that mobile school units end their school term one week before the official school term ends. The reason given is that the mobile school unit teachers have to come to the Ondao mobile school office in Opuwo in the last week of school term to finalise their administration work (i.e. reports, assessments, etc) and submit them to their Heads of Departments on the last day of the official school term. A concern was raised by all nomadic learners interviewed that when the mobile school units close for vacations, they normally face a problem of where to stay and how to survive, as in most cases their parents have left their original location. They usually keep track of the shifting patterns of the nomadic families and once schools close they go with any other nomads who come from the same area as their family.

The following are examples of citations made from some nomadic learners who responded to the questions concerning difficulties in accessing education:

*Sometimes our family migrates from the original place of settlement we knew and we get lost from the direction (of home). Because we do not have place to stay after schools close, we have to walk [long] to find where our family has shifted to.*

Similarly, the majority of the interviewed nomadic learners constantly repeated that the lack of basic needs such as foods, clothes and shelter, are obstacles to educational access for children from nomadic communities. As one child put it:

*Poor nutrition, drinking water, a permanent home to stay, and school uniforms are affecting our access to basic education and our performance.*

The message was very loud and clear to the government and policy makers that since their parents are mobile, they should be provided with all above-mentioned basic needs.

The information from the field study also illustrates that children from nomadic communities do not proceed with their upper primary to secondary education because their parents cannot afford to pay school development fund, school uniforms and other basic requirements such as soap.

In terms of the provision of parental choice, Ball (1993) discusses the markets in education and claims that in the ideal environment every parent is free to make a choice on a school he/she wants to educate his/her children, but this choice is not “open” to Himba and Zemba parents. This is due to their mobility and remoteness where only one mobile school unit with poor resources and poorly trained teachers is available to their children. This constrains the school choice, and may result in no choice at all. This, in practical terms, implies that the right to education for all is limited by the socio-economic realities operating at grassroots level. In addition, some of the teachers deployed in the mobile school units lack a pastoral background, and as a result they find it very difficult to adopt teaching cycles to pastoral seasonality.

Against the above mentioned conditions, this study found that the wide gap in the provisioning of education between the nomads and non-nomads continues to be one of the biggest problems facing pastoralists, and contributes to their continuing impoverishment and social marginalization in developing countries such as Namibia.

Furthermore, this study found that where education is available, there are considerable disparities between conventional and mobile school units with regard to basic facilities (classrooms, and sanitation), basic services (clean water, electricity and telecommunication), qualified teachers, pupil–teacher ratios, and examination pass rates. Although the education policy in developing countries like Namibia provides compulsory basic education for all children, this is not the reality on the ground. Disparity in educational opportunities, both in services and access to formal basic education among nomadic groups, results in high illiteracy rates; particularly among the nomad pastoral peoples in the north west of Namibia and the hunters (San) in the east and north east Namibia.

The general picture that emerged from field study was that some Himba and Zemba parents, community members and leaders make positive comments, such as ‘nowadays it is necessary to send some of your children to school’. However, they also seemed to harbour a considerable amount of negativity towards formal education. Himba and Zemba parents and the community members don’t see the importance of being educated, as they don’t see that education will provide the family with a source of income and make them less dependent on livestock (Krätli & Dyer 2009). These reservations were articulated on the basis of their experience, as some of their children with a formal education are unemployed and roaming around in their communities. Some Himba and Zemba communities added that the current school education is creating an unbridgeable cultural distance between the nomadic children and their parents, as educated nomadic children might learn to despise the way family lives and stay away from a herding life style.

- School feeding scheme

One of the important features observed during the field study was the school feeding scheme at all seven visited mobile school units. The school feeding programme has impacted on the mobile school units’ enrolment rates and attendance as the programme encourages mobile children to enrol and attend school. Women in the village volunteer

to prepare a soft porridge once a day during the school hours. In order to do that each learner has to bring a bottle of water and firewood to school to prepare the meals in large pots over an open fire from Monday to Friday.

Most of the water is collected from water holes or wells dug by the community members. These water sources are also used by the animals. Bore holes drilled by the Government are sparse, and often the pumps do not work for months. Very few of the mobile units had clean potable water at their disposal. During the field study, the researcher saw water that was brought in dirty bottles or even polluted water that was added to the flour to be cooked. The result of the practice whereby children have to bring their own water and firewood is that the school day is substantially reduced - the school day can only start when most of the children have done their home chores and collected the water and firewood. At one of the mobile school units, it was about 9.30 am before school finally started. Equally, the one week earlier closure has also reduced the school calendar by 15 days a year.

During the field study, it was observed that feeding nomadic learners lodging at the mobile units is one of the challenges posed on the education system. Due to long distances, and the movement of parents searching for water and better grazing, mobile units are left with no choice but to allow children to camp at the mobile units. This has created serious challenges in terms of feeding children, as well as the parental roles imposed on the mobile school teachers. For example, since last year (2009), only 15 units moved from their original place, but most of communities move annually, starting normally in second term or at the beginning of the third school term. Parents leave some children to attend school.

The food that mobile units receive through the Regional Office is calculated as one meal per learner per day. Due to this state of affairs, mobile teachers have no choice but to feed the learners lodging at the mobile units at least twice a day. But they often run-out before the end of each school term.

In addition, mobile school teachers have to take up parental roles, as some of children are very young – about six or seven years old. In most cases teachers use their own money to buy food (especially bags of maize meal) to supplement the school feeding programme, and transport them to the health centres and clinics when they are sick. In some cases these children are left with grandmothers/fathers, and as a result some

children then have to look after the elderly people as well as the siblings.

This study is in agreement with Baxter (2005) who argues that school feeding can create a culture of dependence, waste mobile teachers' time with logistics, results in school attendance only during the availability of food, and creates expectations that cannot be sustained by the education systems. In all seven mobile school units visited, the majority of teachers repeatedly stated that the time involved in logistical arrangements involved with the school feeding scheme often exceeds the management of running an educational institution itself.

- Early marriage

Early marriage and teenage pregnancies are some of the common challenges facing the mobile units. Early marriage is a global issue. In Namibia it is quite common, especially in the nomadic groups, and is part of their cultural practices and customs. The consequences of early marriage are serious; simply put, early marriage can violate children's basic rights to a childhood, education, good health and the ability to make decisions about their own lives. It affects the education and well-being of millions of children and has a knock-on effect on poverty and the development of any society.

The physical, emotional and social effects of early marriage are varied, but one of the most common outcomes in Namibia is the withdrawal of girls from formal education. Traditionally, in the Himba and Zemba culture, people in rural villages value marriage more than education for girls. Many girls stop school when they marry. Husbands of young wives are often older men who expect their wives to follow traditions; stay at home and undertake household and child-care duties. In some countries, or schools, they often have a policy of refusing to allow married, pregnant girls, or girls with babies to return. So all the rules, timetables and physical conditions make it too difficult for a girl to attend school and perform her duties as wife and mother.



## 6.10. Conclusion

Drawing largely from the literature review and field study findings, nomads are faced with many problems; ranging from difficult access to basic education, land degradation, loss of land to expanding modern farming practises, urban migration, expansion of tourist game parks, and political instability (Krätli, 2001). Yet countries where nomads are found, including Namibia, experience positive signs as nomads are gradually beginning to embrace formal education and are glad to see their children read and write their mother tongues and English.

During the field study, the Himba and Zemba parents and mobile school teachers confirm the enthusiasm for the formal education rendered through mobile school programme. Most of the respondents consider sending children to school to be important and beneficial. This has been demonstrated by their growing interest in formal schooling by the increase in the demand for more mobile school units in other communities. In some villages the communities have even built their own mobile school units with traditional structures, and only asked the Ministry of Education to provide teachers, and teaching and learning materials. They are happy that their children are receiving a basic education.

Moreover, the mobile school programme marks a significant step forward in providing culturally appropriate education to those who are marginalized due to their traditional lifestyles. They realize that the knowledge and skills that children gain from formal education will help them to diversify their occupations and access new income-generating opportunities. The majority of Himba and Zemba are now aware that they have a right to education, which is linked to their right to vote and to participate in decision-making about policies that may affect their lives.

Political and socio-economic change in African countries like Namibia affects, directly or indirectly, the life of nomadic peoples such as Himba and Zemba in the north west of Namibia. New developments, combined with a rapid population growth, have made it difficult for the nomads to maintain the herd size necessary to feed each clan. Furthermore, it was also found that the majority of Himba and Zemba peoples have realized that the herding sector cannot absorb all the children, and that not every child will want to remain a herder if given a choice. Considering the bleak future of nomadic pastoralism, many Himba and Zemba are now looking for an alternative to herding, and

being educated seems a good option. They also understand that part of the problem stems from the lack of educated men and women, compared with the non-nomads. The absence of nomad groups in production and policy-making has put them at the mercy of their more educated counterparts in the society. The Himba, Zemba and other nomad groups such as San people, therefore now believe that sending some of their children to school is key to achieve participation in all levels of economic activity in society, and the best way to fight for the rights denied them for so long.

Despite the good sign outlined regarding the importance of formal education in general, the Himba, Zemba and other nomads groups continue to be reluctant to send all their children to school. Mobility, lack of funds, faulty curriculum design, and dependence on juvenile labour are some of the causes of poor participation in schooling. Of serious concern to the nomads is the fear that western education will indoctrinate children into western customs and will erode their culture and traditional values. The Himba and Zemba communities believe that the formal education system needs to be adjusted to take into account their values, mobility, social identities, and must respond flexibly to their needs.

To sum up, the challenges affecting nomadic people in developing countries like Namibia in accessing education are various and intertwined with policies, culture and socio-economic lifestyle.

One major factor is that nomadic people around the world are seen as people who are engaged in a lifestyle that is incompatible with modern norms, and it is clear from the onset that the planning and creation of formal education in most of these countries, including Namibia, is premised on a western formal way of life and culture which excludes the nomadic lifestyle.

As a final point, those who are active advocates for education for all need to reflect again on what education should be. It is fallacious to claim that traditional cultures had no education. The only way the nomadic people around the world can overcome their difficulties is by directly participating in the process of development, including the formulation of social policy, the development of education programmes, implementation at the ground level, and sharing in the benefits of such programmes.