

CHAPTER 2

THE BOCHUM DISTRICT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand the context of the Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose Project in the Bochum district, it is essential to understand the background, history, lifestyle and environment of the people taking part in this food security project.

The Northern Province is at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum in South Africa and ranks among the bottom three regions in South Africa in terms of its socio-economic position (Erasmus 1993:3). As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the study area is situated in Bochum, a district in the Northern Province (see Annexure B, Map 1). Bochum is situated approximately 150km north of Pietersburg (see Annexure B, Map 2). The area where this specific research was conducted is located around the Vergelegen village in the Bochum District. Vergelegen falls under the jurisdiction of the My-Darling Transitional Local Council.

The entire Bochum district has only two hospitals and one clinic. Most of the villages in the district are far from hospitals or medical facilities.



Vergelegen village is 50km away from the Blouberg Hospital in the Blouberg district and 70km away from the Helen Franz Hospital in the Bochum district (see Annexure B, Map 3).

The project at Vergelegen village, which is the subject of this study, was proposed to benefit five other villages that are approximately 2km away from the Vergelegen village. These villages are Bergendaal, Bultfontein, Windhoek, Papagaai and Grootdraai (see Annexure B, Map 4). All five villages are approximately 7km away from the nearest clinic, the My-Darling Clinic.

2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Bochum is under the jurisdiction of *Kgoši* Mmalebogo. The people in the study area speak *Gananwa*, and are referred to as *Bagananwa* (the name for the local people is derived from the epithet '*Baganani*', meaning 'Rebels', 'Resisters' or 'Dissidents'). The Bagananwa are a sub-section of the Bahurutshe people (Makhura 1993:35).

The Bagananwa people originally came from Central Africa, and moved into South Africa as part of the Bahurutshe who settled in the Maletle Mountains in Botswana. The Bagananwa later separated themselves from the Bahurutshe under their first *Kgoši*, Sebudi Lebogo (*Lebogo* means 'the

head that rules’, and this is the original and the official surname of the Bagananwa ruling family). The name *Lebogo* referring to *Kgoši* Lebogo was later adopted as the surname *Mmalebogo*. The prefix *Mma-*, meaning mother, was presumably attached to the surname, Lebogo, due to the Bagananwa tradition of female regencies (Department of Native Affairs 1905:3). The Bagananwa were also referred to as the Baitsweng (meaning ‘the people of the Rock or Mountain’ and also referring to the *išhwene* (baboon) as their totem) (Department of Native Affairs 1905:37).

Under *Kgoši* Sebudi Lebogo, the Bagananwa moved to Blouberg. On the Bagananwa's arrival at Blouberg, they found two communities already inhabiting the area. The first was a roaming band of San (the *Barwana*, as the Bagananwa called them). The second group of occupants found at Blouberg by the Bagananwa was the *Batau* (‘the Lion-revering people’) under the leadership of Rapahla ‘Madibana’ (Breutz 1989:28). The Bagananwa overpowered the Madibana and took over their land. The Madibana were subjugated by the Bagananwa.

Because of the Bagananwa's contact with the San and the Madibana, spokespersons indicated that the Bagananwa began to revere more than one totem. These totems are the *išhwene* (baboon), the *phuti* (duiker) and the *kwena* (crocodile).

In the passage of time, the Bagananwa divided into two separate groups under the leadership of Kgalusi Lebogo and under the leadership of Ramatho Lebogo, the sons of Matsiokwane Lebogo (Sonntag 1983:12).

The genealogy of the Bagananwa rulers are set out in Figure 1 (overleaf).

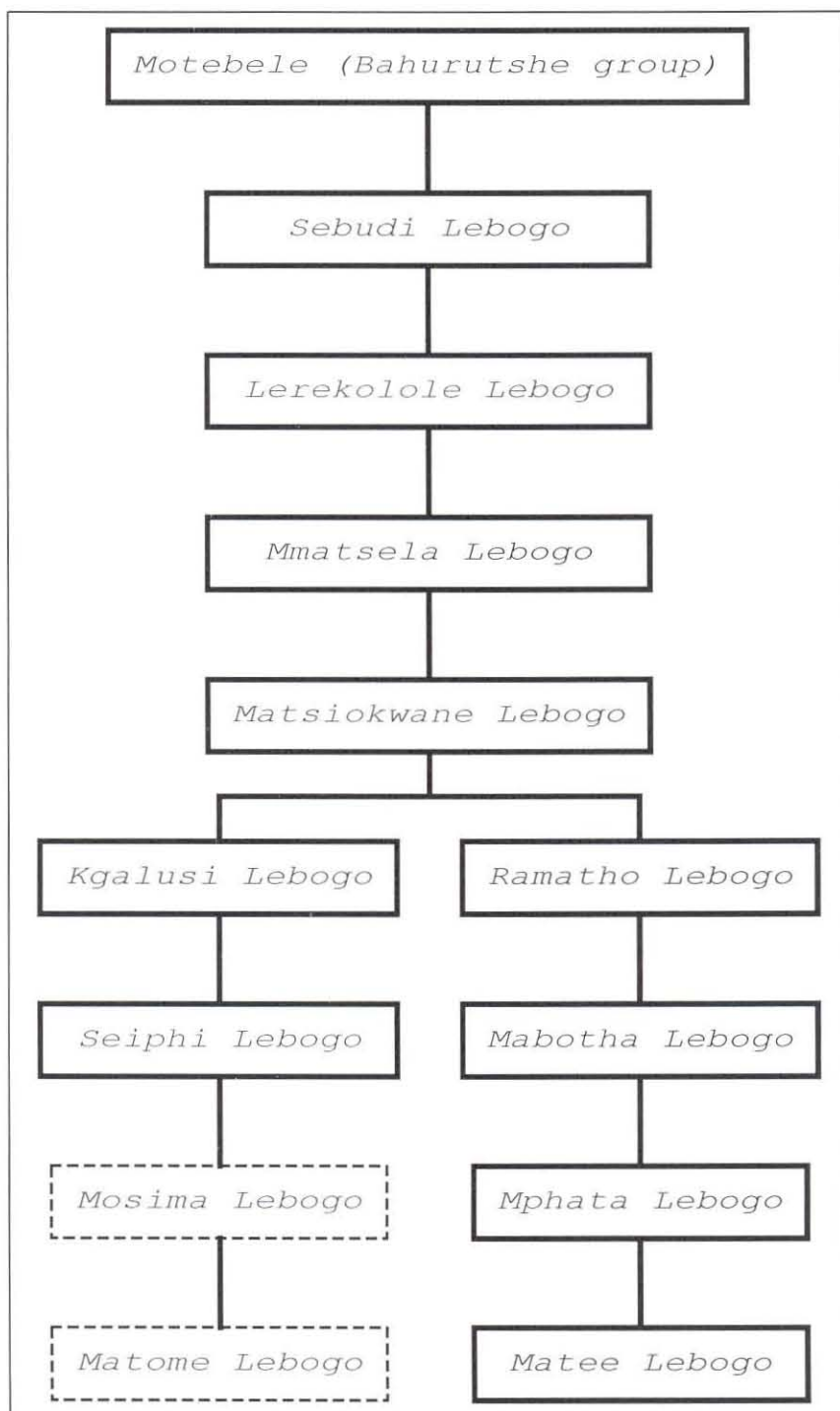


Figure 1: Genealogy of the Bagananwa

Source: Makhura (1993:iv)

According to Makhura (1993:21), the area which the Bagananwa occupied in the nineteenth century was bordered by the Limpopo River in the north. In the east it extended as far as *Tswaiing* (Salt Pan, later referred to as the Soutpansberg), where the Bagananwa area bordered on that of the BaSeleka people (the people of *Seleka*, in what it is today the Ellisras area). The southern boundary was shared with the Matebele of Mapela and of Mokopane, and with the Bapedi communities of Matlala and of Moloto at Moletši. The Bagananwa boundaries were redrawn by the Voortrekkers into a much smaller area south of the Limpopo in the north, almost to the Mogalakwena river in the west, and to the north of Kalkbank in the South (Makhura 1993:21)(see Annexure B, Map 5).

The landscape in which the Bagananwa settled consists of a plateau broken by undulating hills. These hills are called *Mmatemana* (Broad Hills). They stretch almost to the foot of Blouberg and the mountain range called *Rita* (Loskop/Spitskop) further south, near present-day Pietersburg.

This area lies in the Sour Bushveld and Savannah region. Its natural vegetation consists of thorn trees, thorn bush, other deciduous trees and tall grasses, especially along the river valleys (Makhura 1993:45). Grasses such as buffalo grass and red grass are prevalent. The Bochum area is interspersed and watered by the midcourses of the tributaries of the

Limpopo River, particularly the Sand, Brak (*Hlako*), Hout and Crocodile (*Mogalakwena*) rivers and some rivulets and mountain brooks such as the *Bosehla* and the *Kubu*. The area is rainy and warm in summer, but dry and cold in winter (Makhura 1993:45).

The authority structure of the Bagananwa is organised into five hierarchical levels, which represents the distribution of political power in the tribe (Breutz 1991:103). At the base of this hierarchy is the head of ordinary household, a married man. Then follow, in ascending order, the *ntona* (*Rakgoro*), the village *ntona*, the *Molebeledi wa mmoto* (district representative), and at the apex, the hereditary ruler of the lineage, the *Kgoši* (Makhura 1993:3). These hierarchical levels are still of great value to the people at Bochum, except at the base of the hierarchy, in families where there are often no males as heads of families. For example, in the families of women participating in the Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose Project, the women's brothers or fathers have to take care of their needs in communicating with the *Kgoši*.

The family head is responsible for law and order concerning minor issues pertaining to the members of his household (his wife, children and relatives who constitute his extended family). The *rakgoro* presides over the ward (*setho*). The *rakgoro* heads his court and judges petty domestic quarrels referred to him and his council of elders. The village *ntona* presides over

the village and holds court here, assisted by his councillors (Makhura 1993:38).

The *Kgoši's* court presides over land disputes, as land is regarded as the domain of the *Kgoši's* family, and the occupiers of the land are seen as the *Kgoši's* tenants (subjects). The *kgoši* has the right to summon his people to a *pitšo* (meeting) in order to discuss affairs of state (Breutz 1991:106).

2.3 SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE AND CASH CROPPING

In the Bochum area, individuals have a temporary right to plough. All suitable land is covered with irregularly shaped and unfenced *mašemo* (fields), the limits of which are accurately known and jealously guarded by each farmer. Crops of maize, sorghum and wheat are grown.

Ploughing in general is the work of the men, according to spokespersons. Girls from the age of ten until marriage help their mothers with domestic and agricultural duties. Women are expected to take food out to the men when they plough during the morning, but occasionally women and girls are seen leading the oxen. Those women who have no men to plough for them are mostly those taking part in the Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose Project.

After the planting of *dinawa* (black beans), *maphotse* (pumpkins), *dinyoba* (wild sugar cane), *mabele* (sorghum), *magapu* (watermelon), *diponkisana* (white beans), *ditloo* (ground nuts) and *mafela* (maize) comes the long and laborious process of weeding through the summer and autumn. This is essentially women's work.

If the family head can afford it, he brews a large quantity of beer and invites his friends and neighbours to a *letšema* (garden party) during which time they assist in making fields and or weeding. The harvest work is left almost entirely to women. Spokespersons indicated that grinding is also left to women, who find a hole in the solid rock, place the grains in it, and then grind them with a good sized stone until the grain is entirely crushed. Some take wheat to the nearby milling station if they can afford to do so.

Spokespersons indicated that magical medicines are sometimes used to protect and promote the growth of the crops. The main battle is against pests, such as cutworm. The medicine for this is mixed with a mixture of worms and leaves culled from the injured plants, and burnt in a small fire in the windward corner so that the smoke may drift over the field. The treatment is said to be effective. *Meseletšo* is another medicine that should be burnt every evening and morning in the fields, to strengthen the crop.

According to spokespersons, as soon as the crops have been reaped and

cleared from the fields, the fields are opened for grazing.

Cattle farming is an important industry among the Bagananwa. Ownership of cattle is nonetheless not really widespread, as few households own cattle and most of them do not own enough stock to make a living from that activity. Spokespersons indicated that stock-holding was previously mainly practised by the *Kgoši* and tribal officials. Spokespersons also indicated that some individuals keep sheep and goats. Donkeys are kept as a means of transport.

2.4 ECONOMY

The Bagananwa are farmers by tradition; in the past, every married man had a right to his field and communal grazing. The main branches of economic activities were agriculture and pastoralism. Supporting activities included handicrafts, bartering and hunting-gathering. Gender division of labour has always been fundamental to traditional economic organisation (Makhura 1993:53).

Employment in the study area still includes domestic work, according to the spokespersons. People are also employed to help others, for example, in the hunting of animals, or gathering of food. Opportunities for local unskilled employment include domestic work for local entrepreneurs and

working at the shops. However, most of the people are unemployed: They spend most of their time in the shade of the trees (Manamela 1998: Pers.com.).

With the help of the food security project that has been implemented at the Vergelegen village in the Bochum district, women can now be locally employed in another way. The project, however, offers more than just employment. Women are taught skills such as how to plant vegetables. The officials from the Department of Health and Welfare provide these women with education on how to look after their families, more especially children under the age of five (Mothapo 1998: Pers.com.).

2.4.1 Division of labour

According to the spokespersons, the daily routine of women is more strenuous than that of men, and varies with the seasons and according to women's social status. Most of the business of daily life is done out-of-doors; the women perform most of their cooking in the circular court that adjoins their hut.

Women engage in agricultural production processes such as planting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and garnering corn, as well as domestic chores such as collecting firewood, preparing food and rearing children.

Similar labour patterns are noted by Creevey (1986:121) in other areas in Africa (Mali and the Sahel). Women often get assistance from their daughters. It is not unusual to meet girls of seven or eight carrying on their backs a small brother or recently born sister. They take care of newborns, distract them, and console the babies when they cry, protect them against accidents and watch over them like real mothers. This is a sign of responsibility that young girls assume when they begin to use their reason (Manamela 1998: Pers.com.).

Men, including boys, are responsible for other aspects of production like the herding of livestock or hunting. In the past, they also went to war to protect the socio-political system from foreign invasions (Mothapo 1998: Pers.com.).

2.5 DIET

According to spokespersons, maize is the staple food of the Bagananwa. Maize is usually eaten as a hard porridge called *bogobe*, and, to a lesser extent, as a sour thin porridge called *motoho*. *Motepa* is also a kind of thin porridge but it is not sour. *Mageu* is a drink made of maize meal paste.

Grain is hand-milled; most of it is hammer-milled by individuals. It was stated by spokespersons that, if one happens to have enough money, one

can take grain to the milling station, but one has 'to pay double', including transport.

In maize, the nutritional value of protein is said to be low because there is a shortage of essential amino acids, especially of tryptophan (Pootona 1998: Pers.com.). A maize diet does not supply the minimum daily requirements of humans. Efforts must be made to supplement maize with other foods in such a way that amino acids and other proteins will create a balanced diet. A similar view is expressed by Ashton regarding the diet in Lesotho (1967:128).

The Bagananwa diet becomes especially poor in September and October, when the supply of harvested crops is low. Around this time, many people buy grain from the shops at a higher price than that for which they originally sold their own surplus grain after harvest (Manamela 1998: Pers.com.).

As a result of malnutrition, several diseases are found among the people in the study area, including pellagra, kwashiorkor and marasmus. Pellagra is found in both sexes, and affects both children and adults. Pellagra manifests itself in symptoms such as diarrhea, and, in extreme cases, dementia. Children are especially susceptible to it after the age of six. In the Bagananwa area, the mortality rate from pellagra is, however, relatively

low (Pootona 1998: Pers.com.).

On the other hand, it is before the age of six that kwashiorkor symptoms are usually found in children. It is rarely found in Bagananwa adults or in children before their weaning period. Breast-feeding prevents protein deficiency in the babies, but after weaning the requirements for relatively rapid growth are not met by the poor protein value of the diet. Kwashiorkor is associated with a diet low in proteins and high in carbohydrates (Pootona 1998: Pers.com.).

The kwashiorkor symptoms resulting from protein deficiency take time to manifest themselves and often appear in March. It is likely that a precipitating factor such as acute enteritis, which is frequent during the hot months of February and March, may bring out incipient kwashiorkor. With kwashiorkor, besides retardation of growth and development, skin lesions occur on all parts of the body, while with pellagra, they occur only on exposed parts (Pootona 1998: Pers.com.).

Marasmus, on the other hand, is caused by a diet which is not necessarily unbalanced as in kwashiorkor, but which is low in both protein and in calories (Pootona 1998: Pers.com.).

2.6 EDUCATION

The term education is used here in its widest sense; it includes the process by which a child is trained to take its place in society (enculturation). This process operates throughout life and is continuous and incessant, and consists of learning innumerable details about the environment (physical and human) which influences behaviour (Mcquoid-Mason, O'Brien & Greene 1991:14).

According to spokespersons, in earlier times, before missionaries came to the area, the term 'schools' referred to initiation only. Children were sent to initiation school when they reached the age of puberty. This tradition is still upheld. The purpose of initiation schools is to direct and regularise by means of religious rites and a period of character formation under severe discipline. This is done to temper the moral and physical change which takes place in human beings at the age of puberty. In more recent times, boys were allowed to take up modern education, but girls were initially not allowed to go to Western style schools, this is corroborated among other groups by Sechefo (s.a:10).

The significance of initiation lies primarily in its function, marking and effecting the transition from adolescence to adulthood. For several years before initiation, boys are taught to regard initiation as an inevitable part of

their upbringing and what they should look forward to. Until they have been initiated, boys cannot marry, nor take part in various social activities and tribal affairs. As the time for initiation approaches, boys are told exciting stories of life at the lodge, which do not, however, reveal any of its secrets. The prospective initiates meet at the *Kgoši's* village during winter. Sechefo (s.a:18) describes similar practices among the Basutu.

According to spokespersons, girls at initiation school are taught their future womanly duties and the general virtues of humanity, obedience and respect. Girls at the initiation school are called *bale*. For girls, initiation is a less important affair than for boys; certainly there is far less secrecy about it.

According to spokespersons, an adult who has failed to undergo initiation is, even today, still looked upon as a renegade in the family and as an outcast from society. Initiates are pledged never to disclose to the uncircumcised the countless secrets of the lodges, such as a strange language, signs, extraordinary actions, practices, songs and poetry containing ancient history. Even today, according to spokespersons, if one never went to the initiation school, one cannot be given information from the initiation school.

For the most part, the Bagananwa have not received little formal education

and thus tend to be unskilled. Those that received only primary education have problems because they are not being properly trained. In former times, boys were often not allowed to go to school, as that would reduce the number of youths who were available to herd stock. This practice has largely been discontinued today (Makhura 1993:24). A lack of formal education is, however, still a major limiting factor in the development of the people in the study area.

Most of the women in the Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose Project have been taught by the officials of the Department of Health and Welfare how to write their names, which were used for signatures, but some are still unable to sign their names, as it was not possible for the officials to help them all (Mothapo 1998: Pers.com.).

2.7 HEALTH FACILITIES

There are several diseases that are life-threatening to the villagers in Bochum. The whole point of implementing the Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose Project was to prevent malnutrition and reduce diseases that were found to be common in these six villages (Vergelegen, Bergendaal, Bultfontein, Windhoek, Papagaai and Grootdraai). There was a very high percentage of disease among the people in the study area. At the stage of project implementation, the Matron from the My-Darling Clinic confirmed

that malnutrition and diseases such as kwashiorkor, scabies, diarrhea and respiratory problems were common (see Section 2.5). Her statement was supported by the My-Darling Clinic statistics (Pootona 1998: Pers.com.).

Diseases in children may limit growth and social, emotional and intellectual development. Education for sick or malnourished children may be interrupted. Social interactions are often impaired, while the negative attitudes of adults and other children can also have a detrimental effect on disease treatment. The difficulties of coping with diseases lead to chronic disorders, which also lead to increased economic and psychological stress for parents and children. Elderly people are also unable to survive when they are affected by disease. Poverty is both a source and an effect of disease (Malambo 1988:1).

Political boundaries and the affordability of transport commonly determine people's physical access to health services. In the Bochum area, there are only two hospitals, the Helen Franz Hospital and the Blouberg Hospital, and a clinic, the My-Darling Clinic, which most of the people are not able to reach, as these facilities are too far away from people's homes. There is a lack of transport, especially for people in the study area (Mothapo 1998: Pers.com.).

After the project was introduced, there was a change because a mobile

clinic which comes once a fortnight was introduced. The programme was in part designed to implement health plans from the Department of Health and Welfare to fight malnutrition and the diseases mentioned above (Mothapo 1998: Pers.com.).

2.8 WATER AND SANITATION

Large parts of the Bochum district are poorly serviced by infrastructure because of poor planning of settlements (De Villiers *et al.* 1996:15). As a result, the cost of supplying these settlements with running water is high and the water system is often in poor condition due to a lack of skills in the local community (Masilela 1998: Pers.com.). It is mainly the women in Bochum who fetch water. They carry water in tin/cans on their heads. In Bochum, water is fetched from the Glen Alpine Dam, the Crocodile River and from springs at the foot of the Mountain. Within the study area, users frequently have to resort to using unpurified water from these sources, with obvious negative implications for their health (Masilela 1998: Pers.com.).

Water in the study area is mostly required for drinking, cooking, washing dishes, cleaning houses, washing clothes and personal hygiene. Due to the walking distance, clothes are often washed at the water source rather than at home. Extensive use is made of wheelbarrows to convey drums to fetch water to reduce the burden of carrying water on the head. Pickford *et al.*

(1994:7) describe the similar scenario in Africa.

According to the spokespersons, during rainy seasons, spring water is used for cooking and drinking, whilst river water is used for personal hygiene and washing clothes. Rainwater is also collected from roofs and used for domestic purposes.

Women normally make two trips per day to fetch water, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon, because there are delays in queuing at the water point. The availability of water is not always steady or adequate. Given the long walking distances, several family members, if they are old enough to carry buckets, are involved in the main water fetching trip of the day. This include mothers, daughters and grandmothers, anyone strong enough to carry cans. According to spokespersons, this activity is time-consuming.

Sanitation is very poor, as many houses in these villages do not have toilets. It was estimated by one of the Environmental Health Workers in Bochum that about 75% of houses do not have toilets. People go into the bushes or use the riverbanks, with obvious negative consequences for the environment and personal health (Masilela 1998: Pers.com.).

2.9 TRANSPORT

The study area is not well provided with roads and most of the people do not have access to proper transport. Except for the tarred road that starts from the Bochum township, all the tertiary and secondary roads are gravel and in poor condition (De Villiers *et al.* 1996:14). Roads do not connect villages to each other. Instead, they are generally connected to Bochum town. The main modes of transport used in the study area are donkey- or ox-carts. Carting is a persistent element of transport. There is only one bus that runs between Bochum and the study area early in the morning and comes back in the evening from Bochum to the study area. Few of the people in the study area have bicycles or cars.

Most of the villagers walk to the nearby villages and to their fields. Children walk to school. In some villages, there are no schools at all, so that children have to walk to the next village where there is a school. Taxis are available only twice a day.

One of the villagers indicated that subsistence farmers who produce surplus often have difficulty in transporting goods to the market. Sometimes women carry the products on their heads, or farmers rent the services of a ‘bakkie’ owner. Others even use wheelbarrows and carts to convey their produce over long distances. Most of the poor in the study area lack access

to larger centres due to their inability to afford transport.

2.10 COMMUNICATION

The only source of information and entertainment from the outside world in the villages or poor households is the radio. Most of the villagers do not own radios, and some cannot afford to buy batteries for a radio. They do not have ready access to newspapers and do not have telephones. The fact that they do not have access to newspapers reduces their already limited interest in newspapers. This lack of interest in newspapers probably also results from high levels of illiteracy, a lack of local content and a low disposable income among the poor. They cannot afford to go to town to buy a paper which is not relevant to them because it tells them nothing about their own lives.

2.11 MIGRATORY LABOUR

Employment in distant urban areas has led to migration. Migration of adult males is one of the main reasons for the fact that women are in the majority in rural areas and in the Bochum district in particular (De Villiers *et al.* 1996:21). Women do also migrate, but there is currently no reliable estimate of the number of women migrants from the Bochum district.

People move to urban areas as a result of rural impoverishment, landlessness, loss of labour opportunities or because of other perceived advantages of living in town (see Chants 1992:4).

2.12 SUMMARY

This chapter has focused on the background, lifestyle and the environment of the people in the study area, the Bochum district in the Northern province. The Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose food security Project benefits the six villages which form the study area (Vergelegen, Bergendaal, Bultfontein, Windhoek, Papagaai and Grootdraai). It is indicated in this chapter that the people in the study area are the Bagananwa, who originally came from central Africa. The Bagananwa are currently under jurisdiction of *Kgoši* Mmalebogo. The socio-political system of the Bagananwa is organised into five hierarchical levels, as set out in Section 2.2. These hierarchical levels (from the bottom up, heads of families, the *dintona*, the village *dintona*, the *balebeledi wa kgoro* and at the apex the *Kgoši*) are still of great value to the people in Bochum, except at the base of the hierarchy in families where there are often no males as heads of families.

The people in the study area are, to a large extent, dependent on agricultural practices. Cattle farming is important to the people in the study

area, because cattle are used for meeting family expenses, although few own cattle. Goats and sheep are also kept, and donkeys are kept as a means of transport.

The staple food of the Bagananwa is maize. There are some diseases that result from the continuous use of maize as staple food, as indicated in Section 2.5. As a result of malnutrition, several diseases are found among the people in the study area (for example, pellagra and kwashiorkor), as indicated by Pootona (see Section 2.5). Children are said to be susceptible to pellagra after the age of six. Kwashiorkor is said to be associated with a diet low in proteins and high in carbohydrates.

Education in the study area refers to a process by which a child is trained to take its place in society. Spokespersons indicated that before, or in the olden days, education referred to initiation. Boys were taught to regard initiation as part of their upbringing, and without initiation they were not allowed to take part in social activities and tribal affairs. Girls were taught womanly duties, obedience and respect. Spokespersons indicated that they are now also more aware of the importance of formal education and they are willing to take their children to formal schools, but initiation practices continue.

Most of the women in the study area are engaged in agricultural production

processes such as the weeding of grain and harvesting. Men are involved in herding livestock or hunting. Employment opportunities in Bochum are poor, resulting in the migration of men, leaving women in charge of many households in the area.

The health of the people in the study was said to be very bad by a spokesperson the My-Darling clinic as children and older people were affected by diseases. The reason is that the people from the study area experience extensive shortages and a lack of transport to health care facilities.

People in the study area do not have access to proper transport and the roads are said to be poor by spokespersons. The main modes of transport used in the study area are donkey- or ox-carts. Most of the villagers walk to other nearby villages and to the fields, as stated in Section 2.9.

Spokespersons indicated that the Bochum district suffers from poor planning of settlements. That is the reason why the cost of supplying the settlements with running water is high, as indicated in Section 2.8. Water is carried mostly by women, who carry water in tin/cans on their heads. Most of the houses in the village do not have toilets; this results in poor sanitation.

According to the spokespersons, many of the men from the study area migrate to urban areas in search of jobs and better lives. This has the result that single parents (the wives), head the majority of families in the study area.

Communication with the outside world is said to be very poor by the spokespersons. The main source of information in the study area is the radio and not all people own radios. The people do not have access to newspapers and telephones, except when they go to town.

It is against this background that the Babina-Chuene Women's Multi-purpose Project was started, and an understanding of this context is required to underpin the discussion of the project in the following chapter (Chapter 3).