



RESEARCH BRIEF

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The Valuation of Biodiversity Conservation by the South African Khomani San “Bushmen” Community

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In this study, researchers met with Khomani San “bushmen” and Mier “agricultural” communities who live in or near the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in South Africa. The researchers proposed a biodiversity conservation programme that would include planting and protecting native trees, shrubs, and grasslands, and asked the local communities about their willingness to pay for the program. Depending on the particular community and on land tenure arrangements, there would be winners and losers from the proposed programme, but, in each case, the winners would benefit by more than the cost that the losers would suffer. The findings suggest that South Africa’s Khomani San, whose attitudes toward modern conservation have not been evaluated until now, and the adjacent Mier community, generally attach a significant economic value to biodiversity in their area.

The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, located between Botswana and South Africa, encompasses part of the ancestral site of the Khomani San. As part of South Africa’s land restitution programme, the Khomani San community was awarded land inside and outside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in May 2002, together with the adjacent Mier community. In addition, the Khomani San people were awarded additional and special rights in the remainder of the park because they lost more land in comparison to the Mier community during the establishment of the Park. South African National Parks (SANParks) was tasked with co-managing the acquired land inside the park on behalf of the local communities as contractual parks. A contract park is a protected area developed on land belonging to the government, private individuals, or a community. These parks are co-managed by the park authority in conjunction with private individuals or a community through a joint management board. Contractual parks are common in South Africa and Australia.

It is clear from the way land restitution claims within protected areas have been handled so far in South Africa that sustainability and biodiversity conservation are critically important. The government has taken the view that land claims by individuals and groups must be achieved in the national interest by “taking into consideration the

Key Points

- The restitution of parkland to the Khomani San “bushmen” and Mier “agricultural” communities in May 2002 marked a significant shift in conservation in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and environs in South Africa.
- Biodiversity conservation will benefit from this land restitution only if the Khomani San, who interact with nature more than do other groups, are good environmental stewards.
- Both the Mier and the Khomani San want preservation of biodiversity to be undertaken on their lands, and are willing to make payments for conservation of native plants.

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intrinsic biodiversity value of the land, and seeking outcomes which will combine the objectives of restitution with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity”. This notion of intrinsic value implies that biodiversity has a value in and of itself.

Thus, the challenge facing the Kgalagadi area is how the landscape can be managed as a whole in a manner that enhances conservation and complementary land-use practices (e.g., medicinal plant harvesting), and discourages conflicting practices (e.g., excessive stock farming). To ensure success of such an approach, there is a need to ensure sound conservation in the whole area, including communal and municipal lands adjacent to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

The Khomani San “bushmen” and Mier “agricultural” communities in the Kgalagadi area are heavily dependent on natural resources, but their area is threatened by biodiversity loss due to natural ecological causes and the overexploitation of natural resources. There have been changes in land ownership in the Kgalagadi area following land restitution to the local communities in 2002. Biodiversity conservation will benefit from the land restitution only if the local communities, especially the Khomani San, who interact more with nature, are good environmental stewards. To assess their attitudes toward biodiversity conservation, this study used a method called contingent valuation to investigate the values assigned by the Khomani San and Mier communities to biodiversity conservation under three land tenure arrangements: communal land, municipal land, and parkland.

The net amounts that research subjects were willing to pay for biodiversity conservation under various land tenure arrangements ranged from R928 to R3,456 to R4,160 for municipal land, parkland, and communal land, respectively, among the Khomani San, to R25,600 to R57,600 to R64,000 for municipal land, parkland, and communal land, respectively, among the Mier. (The relationship of a Rand to a Euro is about 15 to 1). The majority of respondents from both communities support the implementation of the proposed biodiversity conservation programme on communal land, municipal land, and inside the park.

Conclusions

The Mier generally have higher willingness to pay (WTP) than the Khomani San. For example, the Mier respondents have almost a double median WTP (R25) than the Khomani San (R15) among those in favour of the proposed biodiversity conservation programme on communal land. However, when adjusted for annual median household income, there are no significant differences in the WTP between the two communities. Thus, the Khomani San care about modern biodiversity conservation as much as other indigenous communities in their area and can therefore be trusted to be good environmental stewards. However, in order for all members of the local communities to support biodiversity conservation unconditionally, mechanisms for fair distribution of the associated costs and benefits should be put in place.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief is based on “The Valuation of Biodiversity Conservation by the South African Khomani San “Bushmen” Community,” by Johane Dikgang and Edwin Muchapondwa, October 2012, EfD Discussion Paper 12-10. (The DRB series of research briefs is associated with the EfD Discussion Paper Series.)

FURTHER READING

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