

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON
THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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**Official Country Visit to Botswana
1-12 September 2025**

End-of-Mission Statement

Introduction

In my capacity as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, I conclude today my first official country visit, which took place in Botswana from 1 to 12 September 2025. The purpose of my visit was to establish contact, engage and support ongoing efforts on Indigenous Peoples' rights in Botswana.

I would like to thank the Government of Botswana for its invitation, excellent cooperation throughout my visit, and genuine openness to discuss opportunities and challenges for the advancement of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

During my 12-day mission, I visited Gaborone, Lokgwabe Nama Ward, Zutshwa, Ghanzi, Grootlagte, D'Kar, Shaikarawe, Tsodilo, Molapo in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Maun and Nata.

In the capital, I met with the President of Botswana, Cabinet Ministers and senior Government officials across all sectors, including the Minister of International Relations, the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, the Minister of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, the Minister of Lands and Agriculture, officials from the Inter-Ministerial Committee to Advise Government on Sustainable Solutions Regarding Human Rights of Basarwa (hereinafter the Inter-Ministerial Committee), as well as officials from the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education. I also had the opportunity to interact with the Office of the Ombudsman, and with researchers from the University of Botswana.

In Lokgwabe, Zutshwa, Ghanzi, Grootlagte, D'Kar, Shaikarawe, Tsodilo, Molapo and Nata, I held meetings with Indigenous communities and their representatives. I warmly thank all chiefs and representatives of Indigenous communities, rights advocates, facilitators, and lawyers who devoted time and effort to organise my programme and share their perspectives with me. I am particularly thankful to the women, youth, older persons and persons with disabilities who shared their personal

stories and aspirations with me. Their resilience, dreams and potential attest to the significant contribution they bring to their societies and to Botswana.

In Maun, I attended a Conference of the Indigenous Peoples Network of Southern Africa.

I also take this opportunity to thank the UN Resident Coordinator, the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa, the UNDP, and different UN agencies for their support to make my visit a success.

My statement today constitutes my preliminary observations and recommendations, which I will elaborate in more detail in the report that I will present to the Human Rights Council in September 2026, in Geneva. These preliminary observations neither reflect all the issues presented to me, nor all the initiatives undertaken by the Government of Botswana.

Political commitment

My visit to Botswana comes 15 years after the visit of the former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and I welcome the efforts of previous administrations to implement his recommendations, as well as the profound policy shift in approach to Indigenous Peoples stated by the current administration.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the political will and openness expressed by the current President of Botswana and state authorities to protect and implement the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This commitment is consistent with actions taken by the President prior to his inauguration when as a lawyer, he played key roles in the landmark cases of Roy Sesana and Matshidiso Mmatshame, which dealt with Indigenous land and water rights in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

During my meeting with the President, I was particularly pleased to learn about his continuing commitment to strengthen protections for Indigenous Peoples, emphasising the importance of confronting historical injustices and reaffirming his commitment to policy reform. On 10 December 2024, the President allowed the burial of Pitseng Gaoberekwe, a San elder, on ancestral land after over two years legal battles - marking an important milestone for Indigenous Peoples' land claims. This welcomed approach marks a shift toward acknowledging the unique challenges faced by the San and other Indigenous Peoples in Botswana.

At the institutional level, the President has established an Inter-Ministerial Committee to facilitate a comprehensive approach in addressing the complex challenges experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Botswana. He also referred to possible lifting of bans on subsistence hunting for Indigenous groups, recognizing it as a vital part of their cultural and economic survival.

These actions have been broadly supported by government officials and positively received by Indigenous Peoples, who regard them as an initial step toward achieving justice in Botswana. Botswana's current strong commitment to human rights gives it a leadership position internationally and regionally. I welcome its consideration of ratifying the Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights and the Convention on Enforced Disappearances. I would also recommend the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169, which would represent a major milestone for Indigenous Peoples in the country and the region, and provide a robust framework for the realization of their rights, including through technical cooperation and exchange of lessons learned and practices with UNOHCHR and other ratifying countries across the globe.

While the following Sections highlight some of the topics addressed during my visit, I wish to stress at the outset the importance of having a clear strategic vision on how to translate political will and international commitments into sustainable and practical improvements in the lives of Indigenous Peoples and devoting budgetary resources for that purpose. Such strategic vision should encompass all sectoral and cross-cutting issues concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples and lead to the design of effective and evidence-based policies and measures that are monitored based on disaggregated data and statistics.

The concept of Indigenous Peoples in Botswana

In 2007, Botswana supported the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), but I observed that misunderstandings about the concept "Indigenous Peoples" continue to hinder the State's ability to deliver on these rights. Across the country, I met with people who continue to consider the term "Indigenous Peoples" as divisive or seeking to privilege certain groups over the rest of the population. Others simply argue that all native Africans originating from Botswana before colonization are "indigenous".

There is a noticeable confusion between the dictionary definition of "indigenous" and the human rights concept of "Indigenous Peoples" established under international law. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has clarified that native Africans from Botswana are indigenous to the country but cannot generally be classified as members of "Indigenous Peoples".

The term "Indigenous Peoples" has indeed become a human rights call for justice. It is a demand for redress, made by peoples that suffered or continue to suffer particular historical injustices that led to loss of their ancestral lands and distinct culture. Those injustices consist of high-grade racial discrimination that dehumanize and demean the victims as racially and culturally inferior and backward, and therefore unable to govern themselves, to bring up their own children or to enjoy property rights over their ancestral lands, territories and resources. Due to the distinct nature of human rights violations experienced by Indigenous Peoples, they are not mere minorities, local communities, or economically disadvantaged (poor) groups. The UNDRIP is a remedial instrument, aiming at ensuring equality between these People and other sectors of society by addressing the historical injustices they have suffered.

The communities referred to as the 'Basarwa' in Botswana have self-identified as Indigenous Peoples in an effort to seek remedies for specific historical and continuing injustices. They

informed me that they do not wish to be referred to as ‘Basarwa’ and would prefer to be identified as “Indigenous Peoples” or addressed by their ancestral names. They feel that the word ‘Basarwa’ is derogatory and is a label loaded with stigma.

During my visit, I encountered numerous personal accounts from Indigenous Peoples, describing a reality shaped by marginalization and discrimination. They carry a heavy burden of societal judgement that seeps into every facet of life. Many described to me how they feel invisible or voiceless in their own homeland. Parents recounted, with palpable pain, how their children felt compelled to hide who they are from their classmates and teachers. The schoolyard, ideally a space of growth and acceptance, becomes instead a stage for ridicule. Children reported being mocked for their accents, their clothing, and mostly, for speaking their languages. The weight of this humiliation leads to a profound sense of shame. I encourage the Government to educate the public on the contemporary human rights concept of Indigenous Peoples and explain how it relates to the situation of communities in Botswana, with a view to eliminating prejudices and negative stereotypes.

I observed that the population of various Indigenous Peoples span the borders of several countries in the Southern African region. This includes various San communities as well as a segment of the Nama Indigenous People, who are primarily located in Namibia but also present in Botswana. I learned from these communities that although they can travel freely with their ID cards, the costs of transport are often prohibitive for cross-border contact. The international human rights framework for Indigenous Peoples has specific provisions regarding Indigenous Peoples divided by international borders and calls upon States to ensure those Indigenous Peoples maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes. I call upon the Government of Botswana to include in its cooperation framework with Namibia the enjoyment of those rights by the Nama Indigenous Peoples living in Botswana.

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples

“I just ask the Government to restore our dignity. 90% of us cannot provide ourselves with food. Others disrespect us because of that. Only when you can feed yourself and take care of your children, you consider yourself a human being”, San community leader, September 2025.

During my visit, a number of senior State officials recognised that the absence of legal and constitutional recognition of communities self-identifying as Indigenous Peoples constitutes a significant obstacle to their ability to fully enjoy equal rights with other citizens. These officials also expressed their concerns regarding the 2005 Constitutional Amendment, which removed Section 14(3)(c) of the Constitution - a provision that offered specific protection for the San Indigenous Peoples. This demonstrates a commendable degree of honest self-assessment.

Indigenous Peoples in Botswana told me that their top priority is constitutional recognition and related legal reform. They explained that the current Constitution and recent legal reforms of the Ntlo ya Dikgosi and the Tribal Land Act have not recognised them as equal members of the country alongside larger communities. Many interlocutors stated that Indigenous Peoples have unique cultures, distinct traditional knowledge, languages, and livelihoods that can contribute significantly to Botswana's development and image; but, they are often not recognized as capable of anything.

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples by States involves several steps, including formal acknowledgement of the particular historical injustice they have suffered; constitutional or legal guarantees of their internationally recognized rights; an identification process to distinguish them from other groups such as peasants, minorities, and local communities, as well as; effective governance mechanisms ensuring the effective participation of representative institutions of Indigenous Peoples. As the cultural identity of Indigenous Peoples passes through their own institutions, States should legally recognize and support effective institutions for self-governance, decision-making and representation, as stipulated in the Declaration

I welcome the work of the Inter-Ministerial Committee to benchmark international best practice on the protection and promotion of the rights of Recognition of Indigenous Peoples and particularly point to the statement of formal public apology, and ratification of relevant international instruments, such as ILO Convention No. 169 as relevant practices for Botswana.

Land and resources

In my meetings with Government officials, I was encouraged by their acknowledgement of the significance of enabling Indigenous Peoples to exercise authority over their lands, territories, and resources, as well as their commitment to resolving land rights issues affecting Indigenous Peoples. I was equally encouraged to learn about the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) bill passed this year, which could help Indigenous Peoples strengthen their livelihoods and maintain traditional economies. Significantly, the Government also reaffirmed its commitment to fully implement the high Court ruling supporting the San Peoples of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), with the first group of Indigenous Peoples having returned.

However, Indigenous Peoples consulted during my visit emphasized that they are the only traditional communities in Botswana whose customary land rights have not been acknowledged, respected, or protected. As expressed by one San community representative, *"It is as if we don't belong to this country, yet we are told we were the first inhabitants"*. I was told that land rights challenges fall into several main categories including:

Firstly, there are Indigenous Peoples who were forced out of their customary lands and put in settlements, which are culturally unrelated to them. Members of these groups told me that they feel culturally uprooted, forced to depend entirely on the Government's food basket and unable to cater for themselves. One Indigenous interlocutor requested that I convey the following to the

Government: *“Restore the dignity of the San by empowering them to be self-sufficient, rather than leaving them as one of the few communities primarily reliant on Government assistance.”* Another told me: *“Relocation destroys us, kills our sense of community, undermines our culture. We are brought to unfamiliar places where we feel disconnected, hopeless, and lost.”* In many of these settlements, Indigenous Peoples frequently experience inadequate access to water, food, electricity, health care, transport, communication, and other essential services. I urge the Government to reconsider the settlement scheme to ensure Indigenous Peoples can return to their customary lands or are provided with lands of equal size, value and legal status, as provided for by the UNDRIP.

Secondly, there are Indigenous Peoples who live on lands privately owned by individuals, farmers or entities such as churches. These Indigenous Peoples are literally squatters depending on the good will of the landowners. As expressed by one community representative: *“Here on this land belonging to the church we own nothing”*. Moreover, public services are often not available on private lands, and individuals residing on private farms do not benefit from state services and allocation of resources and may have to leave when they are no longer able to work. I encourage the Government in its plans of acquiring lands from private owners and give them back to Indigenous Peoples.

Thirdly, only a limited number of Indigenous Peoples have been permitted to exercise their “right to return” to the CKGR, but they have not yet been provided with the essential resources and services required to make such a return sustainable and attractive. Indigenous leaders in CKGR told me: *“Yes we were allowed to be back here in CKGR but here we are without our wives who had to accompany our children to schools in settlements. We need government services here so our families can live with us.”* I call upon the Government to ensure adequate living conditions for those who have returned to the CKGR.

Although the CBNRM framework shows promise, there are concerns that it may contribute to further marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples often lack representation on their community trust boards thus marginalizing them further. Even where Indigenous Peoples are the majority, the communities still expressed that the Trust Advisory Committee has too much control over the function of the trust and many of their proposed projects aimed at improving their communities never make it to implementation.

Traditional institutions and right to equal participation in public affairs

During my visit, I was pleased to hear about the broad mandate of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, as well as the comprehensive and inclusive process of undertaking consultations with Indigenous Peoples, through their own representative institutions, started in April 2025. Originally mandated for 6 months, the work of the Inter-Ministerial Committee is still ongoing and will be extended, including with a view to including more Indigenous communities in the consultations. I encourage the Committee to be as inclusive as possible. I stress the importance of consultation and participation as key mechanisms to ensure that future initiatives and programmes are aligned with

the rights, aspirations and priorities of Indigenous Peoples. Hence, I encourage the Government to broaden, deepen and institutionalise these mechanisms to ensure that the needed reforms, initiatives and subsequent implementation and monitoring processes are undertaken in full collaboration with Indigenous Peoples.

It is important to stress that consultations alone are not enough. Throughout my visit, Indigenous Peoples continually expressed frustration with the lack of representation at all levels of government. The Bogosi Act recognizes the traditional chiefs and structure of the Tswana tribes and the House of Chiefs has 8 permanent members for the hereditary chiefs of the major Tswana Tribes but leaves out Indigenous Peoples and other tribes, which do not enjoy similar permanent representation. The Land Board themselves are named after these 8 major tribes, and while it does not grant title to the Chiefs, it leaves Indigenous Peoples feeling excluded from the lands in which they reside.

In my travels, Indigenous Peoples spoke of how there is no recognition for the diverse traditional institutions of Indigenous Peoples and of the difficulties of having their own Chiefs recognized. San noted challenges with having their arbitrators officially recognised, leaving the community without an authorised way to resolve disputes according to tradition. I encourage the new administration to prioritise this issue.

I similarly heard from the San and Nama on their lack of representation in Parliament. The high cost of running for office and the Indigenous Peoples low numbers respective to the rest of the population are difficult barriers for them to overcome. As such, there are no members of Parliament that come from the Nama or San. While many expressed pride in being Botswanan, they nonetheless felt they could not participate in decision-making on legislation and policy that would affect them. This lack of representation left many with a scepticism whether the government would act on the recommendations from consultations undertaken by the Inter-Ministerial Committee.

Customary law and access to justice

Within the dual justice system of Botswana, local chiefs can administer customary law in their communities. I was encouraged to hear that the current administration is aware of many of the issues regarding representation of Indigenous Peoples in the Bogosi system and the lack of representation in the House of Chiefs, and that the Government recognizes the need to empower Indigenous chiefs in this role. Much like with Indigenous institutions, Indigenous customary law needs to be recognized and administered equally in Botswana.

While I heard from the Government that chiefs and adjudicators would apply the customary law of the person bringing the claims before them (regardless of whether the chiefs were Indigenous themselves), I also heard conflicting reports from the communities I visited. Indigenous Peoples expressed that their issues were often dismissed by non-Indigenous chiefs who did not understand their customs or held prejudices against them.

Negative perceptions and prejudices held by society at large also risk influencing the criminal justice system, e.g. with the risk of interpreting crimes committed against Indigenous individuals as reflective of their culture. Additionally, the ban on hunting and other traditional occupations has led to criminalization of traditional occupations, such as hunting, although the continuation of such practices in certain areas constitute the alternative to hunger. I encourage the Government to engage with Indigenous Peoples to ensure that their customary laws and practices are respected within the national legal system instead of pitted against it.

Within the statutory justice system, access to justice is significantly hindered by the lack of translation services in formal court proceedings, as Indigenous languages are not recognized or accommodated within the judicial system. Without interpreters, some Indigenous persons are unable to understand the charges against them, participate meaningfully in their defence, or follow the proceedings, effectively silencing their voices in matters that deeply affect their rights and livelihoods. This linguistic barrier not only undermines fair trial standards but also perpetuates systemic exclusion from legal protections guaranteed to all citizens. Will the Legal Aid Act provides for free legal services for impoverished people, the extension of services to rural areas is constrained by limited resources. I encourage the systematisation of legal advice and provision of interpreters in all Court proceedings for citizens not speaking official languages.

I commend the work of the Ombudsman Office and its new dual mandate, which establishes it as the National Human Rights Institution of Botswana. I further commend the Office for its prioritisation of Indigenous Peoples as one of its thematic areas. I encourage the government to support the Ombudsman Office so that it can reach A-status under the Paris Principles and better serve the country, including Indigenous Peoples.

Right to cultural integrity and language

In the Indigenous communities I visited, a common concern was the threat to language and culture. Most communities worry about the future of their languages and do not have any instruction in their mother tongue. Many Indigenous languages are at a critical point where fluent native speakers are aging, and each generation is less proficient than the last. The Nama expressed similar fears of their language and hope for the Government to design a targeted programme to revitalise the language, including by engaging with Nama communities in Namibia where the language is still strong. but have yet to receive any support from the government.

A common theme that arose throughout all the Indigenous communities I heard from is that language restoration is key to their cultural integrity and survival. Indigenous languages encapsulate their unique life ways and cosmovisions. The Indigenous Peoples I met with lamented the erosion of their cultural identity as unique Indigenous Peoples. The loss of language has resulted in the loss of many of their songs and ceremonies, with less and less individuals in each community who remember their original life ways. Practices such as traditional massages and medicine gathering are slowly fading as well.

Relocations and loss of access to their traditional lands and territories have resulted in the loss of sacred and cultural heritage sites. Also troubling, I heard instances where other tribes are claiming cultural sites belonging to Indigenous Peoples, such as at Tsodilo Hills, contributing to the further erasure of Indigenous identity and cultural integrity.

I was heartened to see that one of the main focuses of the Inter-Ministerial Committee was to examine the causes of the cultural erosion facing Indigenous Peoples in Botswana. I am hopeful that the government will not only look at best practices for promoting and reviving Indigenous cultures but also adopt preventive measures against those who would co-opt it for their own benefit and against the interest of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Peoples also expressed to me their desire to use their traditional knowledge and customs for the economic benefit of their communities. Indigenous tracking and hunting skills could be used for guided tours of safaris, Indigenous artwork and crafts could be sold at cultural centers, and Indigenous dance exhibitions like the Namastap Dance could provide unique experiences that provide economic benefits and employment for Indigenous communities while reviving and strengthening cultural ties. I would encourage the government to invest and support these initiatives to bolster Indigenous self-sufficiency.

Right to education

In my meeting with the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education, I was pleased to learn about initiatives to adapt primary education services to the circumstances of Indigenous children, including by establishing satellite schools, differentiating requirements, employing teacher aides and translating teaching materials into Indigenous Languages. I hope to see more programs like that emerge across the country. I appreciated the candid discussions with Government officials who expressed that, despite such affirmative action efforts, the education situation of Indigenous children continues to be alarming. While no disaggregated data exist at national level, government officials confirmed that data from proxy indicators show disproportionately high drop-out rates and generally low education achievements for Indigenous children, especially girls. This was confirmed in community consultations.

While a range of measures and incentives to encourage teachers to work in remote areas to address geographic disparities in teacher deployment and improve access to quality education for Indigenous Peoples are considered, very few are implemented. I met a teacher who said that, unlike officially stated, he did not benefit from any hardship allowances to compensate for difficult living and working conditions. He only benefits free housing that he has to share with a number of other colleagues. This precludes him to bring his family and demotivates him for remaining longer in the school assigned. I recommend strengthening and implementing incentives for teachers to work in remote areas, including housing, hardship allowances, and career advancement.

Visiting a number of settlements, I learned that school facilities are only available for children in initial grades or not at all. The lack of facilities in Indigenous communities is related to the population-based development system in Botswana, whereby communities need a certain number to be recognized for establishment of e.g. schools. Indigenous communities throughout Botswana told me that they “do not have the numbers” to qualify for schools or other basic public services.

Consequently, I was told that many Indigenous children need to relocate to larger settlements or villages to access school. In the best cases, they can stay with relatives and are accompanied by their mothers, but the situation still splits families. Positively, the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education acknowledges that a different education model for Indigenous children is needed, e.g. through the establishment of mobile schools, and the Ministry is currently seeking inspiration from other countries in that regard. I encourage the Government to find ways to establish school facilities where the children are located.

When reaching junior/secondary schools, many Indigenous children are moved to hostels, located far from their homes. I was told that at the hostels, there are incidents of bullying, theft of clothing and books, and allegations of insufficient food rations. In general, the hostel system removes the children from their parents and uproots them from their cultural and linguistic environment with dire consequences, especially for the girls. Some children run away from the hostels and are at great risks, as they seek to find their way back to their parents.

One of the most disturbing situations that was brought to my attention is the risks faced by young San girls located in hostels. In the words of a girl, who went to a hostel *“We struggle with resources because our parents cannot give us enough. Young girls are therefore attended by men from around the hostel, who give them money and drugs. Therefore, the girls become pregnant”* (San girl, September 2025).

The implications of this situation of sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls are profound and far-reaching; the girls drop out of school, they return to the communities as single mothers and many of them become infected with HIV.

I urge the Government of Botswana to immediately review the hostel system to enable Indigenous children, and in particular girls, to enjoy equal access to quality education while protecting their rights to dignity, life and security.

Another barrier that was constantly brought up in community meetings is related to the inadequacy of the cultural and linguistic learning environment. The Government language policy provides for the use of mother tongue as a means of instruction in the lower grades, but many Indigenous children do not benefit from this, given the lack of Indigenous teachers. Other communities, such as the Nama, call for their language to also be a subject of teaching, given the immediate risk of losing their language. The employment of complementary “teacher aides”, which should assist Setswana-speaking teachers, has not yet been rolled out in the communities visited.

I encourage the Government to continue its efforts to ensure a culturally and linguistically conducive learning environment for Indigenous children, including by designing a targeted teacher training programme for Indigenous youth, and by building on the educated human resources already present in Indigenous communities. The authorities should consider integrating Indigenous history, knowledge systems and values into the national curriculum, to foster pride, awareness and sense of belonging.

Equal access to public services and development

“It seems like all government development policies and programmes were designed while we were sleeping. When we woke up, everything was designed to exclude us. If we ask for help, they give us papers, but that is most difficult, because we do not know how to read and write. We have lost hope completely”, San community elder, September 2025.

Since 1978, Botswana has implemented the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) as an affirmative action initiative to reduce inequalities in health, education and economic development between remote area dwellers and other sectors of society. While the intentions have been good, government officials affirmed that the outcomes have been limited, as RADP interventions are often designed as standard models for development, without taking into consideration the specificities of each community.

In this context, I welcome the government’s expressed commitment to follow a human rights-based approach to reform and redesign the RADP, with a view to empower Indigenous communities and protect their rights. I also positively note that the forthcoming National Development Plan 12 (NDP12) is expected to include specific considerations for Indigenous Peoples.

The need for change was confirmed in my visits to communities. I heard about cases where livestock is provided in areas without sufficient water supply or where livestock is eaten by predators. Moreover, I was told that RADP does not distinguish between Indigenous Peoples and other groups inhabiting remote areas. Hence, in settlements where these other groups hold decision-making power, including in community trusts, Indigenous Peoples do not benefit as intended. Where Indigenous Peoples live within bigger villages or towns or on private lands, their presence is invisible, and they cannot benefit from the RADP.

I visited communities that do not have any recognised rights to lands and resources, which excludes most development options. Ironically, many of these areas have traditionally been managed by Indigenous Peoples and generate considerable revenue from tourism and hunting, but without benefit-sharing with the communities. The resources of these Indigenous communities in terms of traditional environmental knowledge, crafts, arts and music remain an untapped potential.

Most Indigenous communities reported about a situation of chronic and structural poverty, where they for decades have been dependent upon government social assistance to cover basic needs for food, water and housing. Several communities reported that their basic needs for food and water are not covered. I heard from many that this situation undermines the self-esteem of entire communities, who can see no prospect of change for the future. I also learned that the feeling of hopelessness leads to alcohol abuse, which again is associated with gender-based violence. Some of the particular concerns that were brought to my attention include:

- Irregularity in the delivery of government supplies of water and food rations, which leads to hunger and malnutrition
- Irregularity in the presence of mobile health clinics, which present a particular problem for those with chronic diseases such as hypertension and HIV/AIDS. Patients in need of regular medication often have to relocate for better access to health services
- Insurmountable barriers for Indigenous communities to access credits for economic development
- Communities with no recognised land rights cannot access services such as public water sources, electricity etc.
- Transport and communication infrastructure in remote areas is poor, contributing to marginalization
- Elder community members have to travel up to eleven hours in trucks (one way) to access their pensions
- Elders have difficulties in getting assistance from government institutions due to language barrier

For the health sector, in addition to mobile clinics and other outreach initiatives, a number of measures can be considered such as training health workers in Indigenous languages and cultural practices to reduce barriers to care and improve trust; recruit and train Indigenous community members as health workers to serve their own communities

I praise the decision of the Government to profoundly change the approach of the RADP. To address the shortcomings of the RADP's one-size-fits-all, there is a need for a culturally inclusive and purpose-driven Indigenous People Programme that is specifically designed to align with their unique needs and realities. I recommend, and underline the need for continuous monitoring of the outcomes of these initiatives, including through the generation of disaggregated data on the situation of Indigenous Peoples, regardless of their location (within settlements, villages, towns or on privately owned lands). I therefore encourage the government, in coordination and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and based on the principle of self-identification, to explore modalities for generating such data, including administrative and community-generated data, targeted research, and collaboration with Statistics Botswana and other relevant state institutions.

Labour issues

“They took us from the bush, brought us closer, to use us as cheap manpower”, San community leader, September 2025.

Throughout Botswana, Indigenous Peoples reported that they can no longer practice their traditional occupations such as hunting and gathering, given restrictions in land and resource use. At the same time, employment opportunities remain extremely limited in Indigenous communities. The Government has a target to reserve 15% of positions in certain public institutions (e.g. the police and the military) to remote area dwellers, and in some cases has reduced requirements and established mobile recruitment centres to attract candidates. However, many of these positions are allegedly filled by candidates from the more dominant groups in the settlements. In some settlements, the Ipelegeng unemployment relief program, is a main source of employment, but it has limited sustainability as it only provides temporary (3 months) employment for selected individuals. In some areas, Community Development Trusts provide employment for a few, but without access to land and resources, the potential remains limited.

The communities I consulted therefore emphasised the need for targeted interventions to create youth employment, including through vocational training linked to traditional knowledge and practices, which, for example, is an asset for the tourism and conservation sectors. Another important strategy is to engage the private sector in employing Indigenous youth, including in managerial positions. That would motivate other youth to strive for better education outcomes.

In my meetings with both government officials and Indigenous communities, I was informed about the precarious situation of San communities who, through generations, have lived on private farms. These farm workers receive very low salaries, which do not allow them to establish independent housing or seek opportunities elsewhere, and the work is passed on from one generation to the next. Provisions of food and alcohol brought by the farm owners are deducted from the meagre salaries, which, in the worst cases, may amount to a situation of bonded labour. As these communities have no land of their own, the Government has difficulties in providing public services such as schools and health facilities.

Representatives from both the Department of Labour and the Ombudsman confirmed that there are incidents of child labour on some farms, including the worst forms of child labour, which includes hazardous work, such as the spraying of cattle as well as sexual exploitation.

I was informed that child labour is addressed both through the Employment Act and the Children’s Act, and that labour inspections are undertaken, including in collaboration with trade unions and NGOs. The Ombudsman also has powers of inspection to access such farms. Despite these efforts, community members confirmed that the situation persists, as some farm owners continue to take advantage of the poverty and generally marginalised position of these San communities, who see no alternatives to their current situation.

I was informed that the Government is currently working with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to develop a national action plan to eliminate child labour. I therefore urge the government, with the assistance of the ILO, to specifically address the situation of child labour in Indigenous communities. I am also convinced that these incidents of child labour are reflective of broader and deeply ingrained patterns of inequality and marginalisation, and I recommend the Inter-Ministerial Committee to specifically analyse the situation of San communities living in private farms, and develop comprehensive strategies for support, including through provision of basic services, land restitution and poverty alleviation. I would also recommend the government to work with relevant farmers associations to ensure compliance with the relevant ILO Conventions ratified by Botswana (Conventions Nos. 29, 105, 138 and 185) and to assume the responsibilities of private businesses under the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Finally, I want to highlight the relevance of ILO Convention No. 111 as a key instrument for eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation, including for restoring Indigenous Peoples' rights to perform their traditional occupations such as hunting and gathering.

Extractive industries and land-based energy projects

During my visit, I was informed about the ongoing diversification of Botswana's economy, including the opening of new mining operations and the prospects of large-scale renewable energy projects, among others. Given the increasing global demands for energy, metals and transition minerals, some of which are present in the country, this trend is likely to continue.

Extractive industries and the energy sector have long been associated with negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples' rights and their ancestral lands. These potential impacts include environmental degradation, land dispossession, socio-economic disruption, and erosion of cultural heritage. International standards have established the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a key safeguard to ensure that investments on Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories do not result in harm. FPIC extends beyond mere consultation; it requires engaging in genuine and meaningful negotiations conducted in good faith, recognizing Indigenous Peoples as rights holders likely to be affected by a project or initiative.

I commend the Government of Botswana for including representatives of Indigenous Peoples in the consultations around the Government's forthcoming Botswana Economic Transformation Programme. In this context, I also encourage the Government to adopt legal and policy frameworks on FPIC in order to ensure all its citizens, particularly those in rural areas, benefit the most from the extractive sector, energy projects and other large-scale projects.

Regional and international cooperation

With its commitment to redress the historical injustices against Indigenous Peoples, the Government of Botswana is positioning itself as a human rights champion, including in the regional

context. However, I also know that the process to turn this commitment into change on the ground will require considerable efforts and resources, and face challenges as it evolves. I therefore call upon likeminded governments, donors and civil society organisations in the region and at a global scale to assist the Government and the Indigenous Peoples of Botswana in their journey, including by providing the technical assistance, lessons learned and good practices, capacity-building efforts and other resources that may be needed.