

TEACHING... Teacher Bastar Tjipombo in action inside the tented classroom. Everything at the school is mobile, including the chairs, tables and blackboard. While the Onyuva unit has not moved for the past four years, there are units that move up to twice a year.

Most of us picture a conventional classroom with desks, chairs and a blackboard when we hear the word school.

It is not the case for many children in Namibia who have never been inside a proper classroom. This does not mean though they do not go to school.

More than 2 500 children in the area north west of Opuwo in the Kunene region are part of a very special and unique school, known as the mobile school.

It is registered as one school with a principal and three department heads, but consists of 30 units spread out all over the region. In-

stead of conventional, permanent school buildings, the units consist of tents, which are used as classrooms. The learners sit on fold-up camp stools at fold-up tables. There is a portable blackboard, while posters and pictures cannot be stuck on the walls, but hang from a line like washing.

The idea is to make the school as flexible as possible to fit in with the nomadic lifestyle of the Ovahimba and Ovathemba people in the region. The units can therefore be packed up and moved to a new location whenever the communities have to move to find new water or grazing for their livestock.

Units are also flexible with their school hours to fit in with household tasks, such as herding cattle or fetching water, the learners have to perform at home.

"When parents tell us they need the children at home in the morning for herding duties, we start school later," a teacher at Onyuva (north of Orupembe), Bastar Tjipombo told the Youthpaper. He is one of two teachers at Onyuva teaching 35 learners from Grades 1 to 6.

According to Kabajani Kamwi, regional director for education in Kunene, the programme started with six

Education on

units in 1998. Today there are 30 units with 73 teachers and about 2 500 children.

The programme ties in with government's policy to provide education for marginalised children. "It was always a problem to capture the Ovahimba and Ovathemba children," said Kamwi. The Norwegian government was interested in the policy to provide equitable access to schooling for all children and provided the money for a feasibility study in 1995.

The mobile school programme was launched in 1998 with the Namibia Association of Norway (Namas) as a partner.

According to Kamwi this agreement runs out in 2005 when government will take over completely. At the moment Namas pays half of the teachers' sala-

ries, and provides logistical support, learning materials and stationery.

It was clear the Onyuva learners did not lack aptitude and enthusiasm for learning as they eagerly asked and answered questions during a recent visit.

Kaingona Tjumbua, who is in Grade 2, and one of only three girls in the school, said her favourite subjects were maths and English. She wants to become a teacher one day and asked what she needed to do to become qualified.

Another learner in Grade 5 said he liked maths because it helped to open his mind, and he liked to calculate fast. Most of the learners wanted to become teachers, policemen, nurses or doctors. One of them said he wanted to be the chairperson of the Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) one day.

IRDNC is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in the region and took the Onyuva learners on a trip to Puros last year to see the wildlife and teach them about their responsibility towards the environment. Many of them saw elephant, giraffe, zebra, ostrich and oryx for the first time.

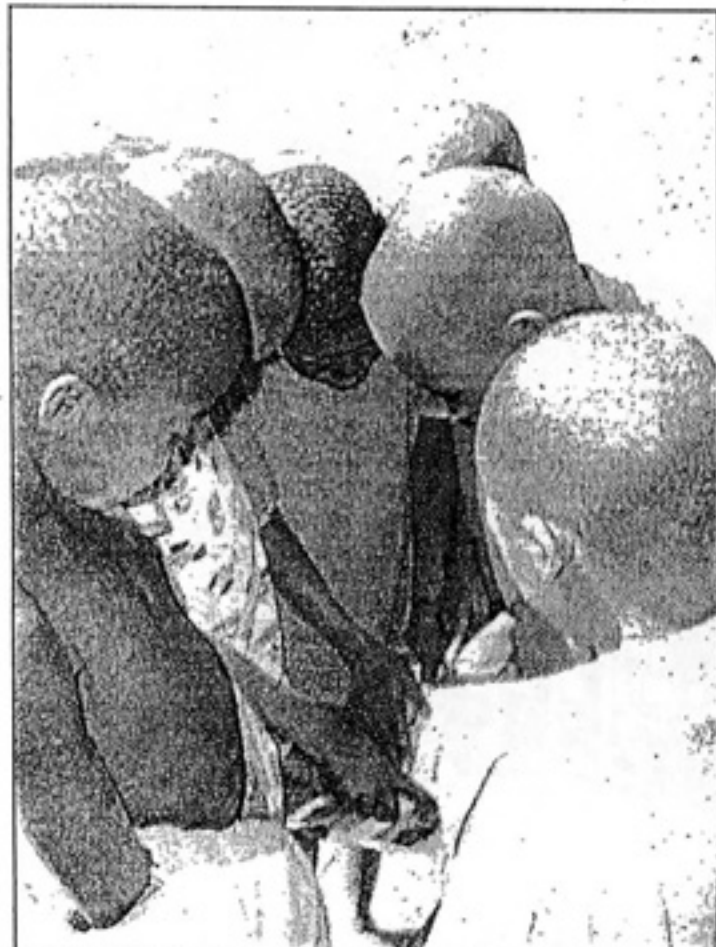
This trip was clearly a highlight as they still fondly recalled all the animals they saw and what they had learned from the experience.

"We want those animals at Onyuva as well," said one, "so tourists would

come here. The community will then start looking after the environment." Another said if they had those animals at Onyuva they could introduce



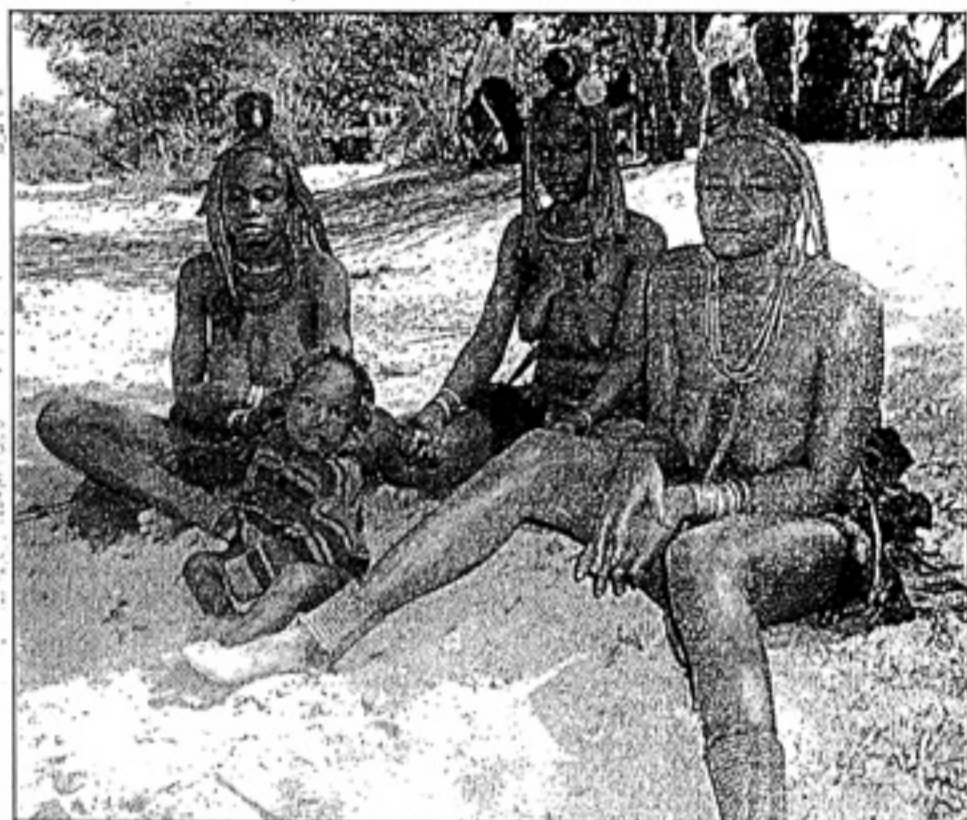
TRANSPORT... In the remote parts of the Kunene region vehicle transport is a luxury, so are telephones or even electricity. For many the only means of transport is a donkey. This 11-year-old girl is being taken to school on the back of one. She has to travel about 30 km to get to the school at Otjikondanvirongo, which is about 80 km northwest of Sesfontein.



HEADS TOGETHER... Some of the boys immediately immersed themselves in one of the books trying to spot birds they might know.



REQUESTS... While the children are fortunate to have a school close to home, they do not have the luxury of libraries or any other extra educational facilities. The learners had some requests, including pens, shoes and books to read. Kaingona Tjumbua (third from right) asked for books specifically on animals and plants. Linda Baker (right) of the IRDNC donated a bird book and a tree book to the unit for the learners to get to know their environment better.



PARENTS... Maria Mupurua (right) feels it is good that her children can go to school. She plans to send her baby daughter as well one day. She and the other two women serve on the committee of the Orupembe conservancy.

trophy hunting which would bring financial benefits to the community. Euphrasius Dawids, senior field officer of the IRDNC said it was very exciting to take the learners on these trips. "It is great to see them coming out of their shells. These trips broaden their horizons so much as they

duties at home any more. In many cases children lost their traditions. For the chairperson of the Orupembe conservancy, Uriparue Tjiningire it is important that his two children finish Grade 12 and get a further education. He said he would love to see one

children far away to school. Maria Mupurua, who serves on the Orupembe conservancy committee, feels it is a good thing that her son is going to school. She wants him to finish Grade 12. She said it was not a problem that he was at school, because she had another child at home to help with the duties. "He is not interested to attend school." She wants her baby daughter to also go to school one day.

communities has definitely become more open to the idea of school." While the mobility of the units has presented some problems, such as a settlement splitting in two when moving to a new location, Kamwi said they had to keep on being flexible. On the other hand there is a move to make some schools permanent. About six of the units are no longer housed in tents. At Puros and Otjinungua, Raleigh International has helped to build permanent classrooms. "We are trying to make the units conform to conventional schools as much as possible as we do not want to offer a second class education to these children," said Kamwi.

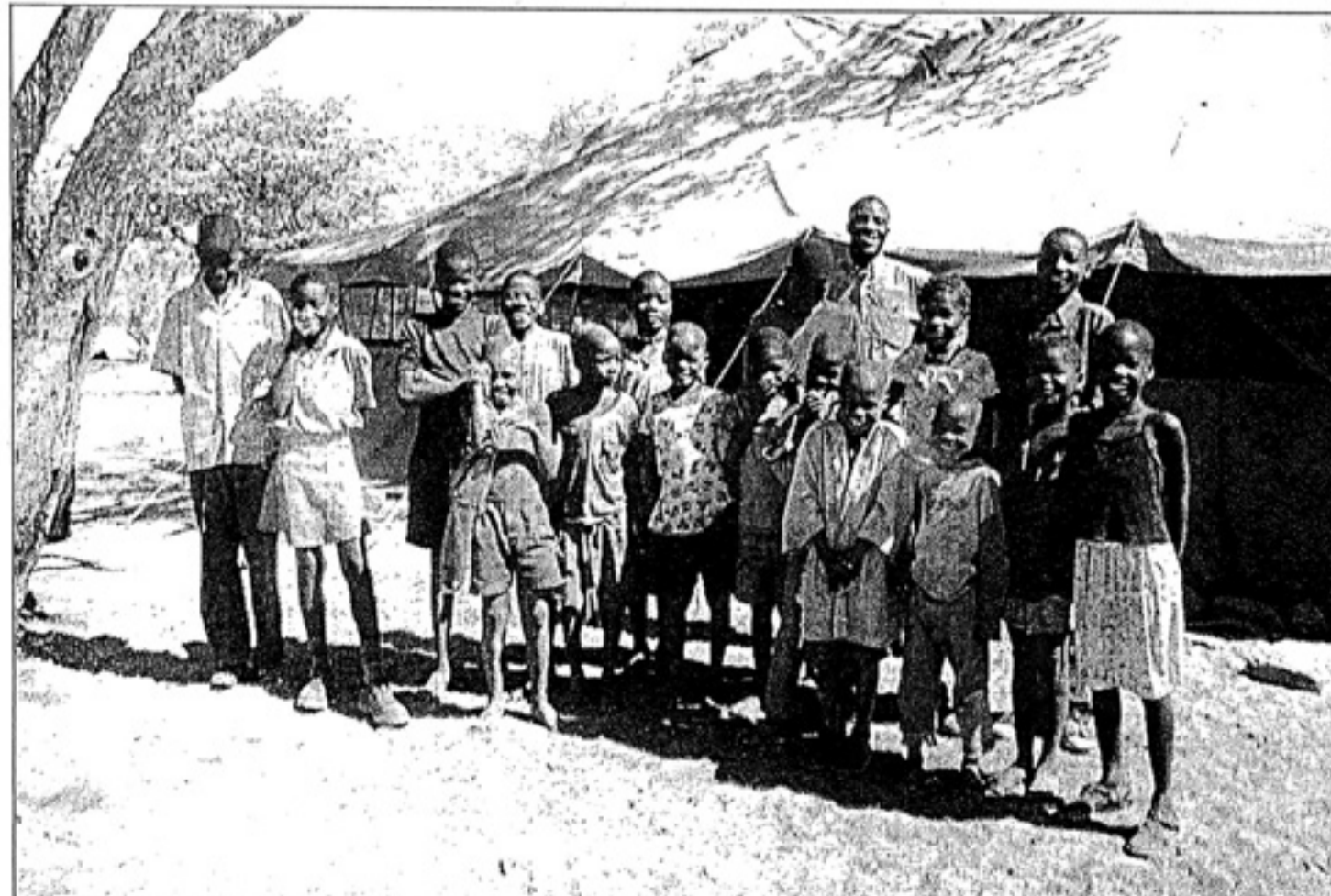
So far many more boys attend school than girls. The split is 70 to 30 per cent between boys and girls. Kamwi did not want to speculate on the reasons for this. The teacher at Onyuva said it was either that many girls were not interested in school, or the parents did not send them. The three girls at Onyuva were very enthusiastic about their studies. According to the regional director proof of the success of the programme is the tremendous growth in units from six to 30. "We are very pleased with the success. The

Whether they sit in tents on fold-up chairs, or whether they have upgraded to a conventional classroom, the children in the Kunene have proved it is possible to be educated no matter what the circumstances are. - Maggi Barnard

the move

are taken out of their environment to experience many new things." Many Ovahimba and Ovathemba parents are starting to realise the value of an education for their children. Before they were hesitant to send their children away to schools that were only situated in towns. This meant they could not help out with

of them become a journalist. He has a boy and a girl at Onyuva. "It used to be very difficult for us to send our kids to school as it was not in our culture. It is only those parents who have opened their minds that send their children to school." He said the mobile school has helped them a lot as they no longer need to send their



OUR SCHOOL... Some of the 35 learners in front of their classroom at the Onyuva mobile school unit. The rest of the school went to play soccer at Opuwa on the day the Youthpaper visited. At the back is their teacher, Bastar Tjipombo.



FURTHER STUDIES... Uriparue Tjiningire, chairperson of the Orupembe conservancy, wants his son and daughter to continue their studies after school one day.