



WOMEN IN FIRE

Knowledge Exchange 21 June 2021

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"Her parents taught her methods of dealing with bush fires, that it is more useful when burning the veldt especially during winter time when the grass still has moisture because it does not burn in more volumes whereas in dry season it is more difficult to control."

— Interview with Ms Kunxaa Beesa, /Oabatsha Community Botswana



Women and children from the /Oabatsha community participating in the ISFMI cultural exchange, 2019

INTRODUCTION

On 21 June 2021 women from Botswana and Australia gathered (on Zoom) to share stories about women working on fire.

The session included women from:

Government of Botswana:

Mrs Baitshedi Edith Hill - Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism

Ogotse Modise, Department of Forestry and Rangelands Resources

Government of Australia:

Lisa Nitschke – Branch Manager, National Indigenous Australians Agency, Land Policy and Environment Branch

Susan Newling - Advisor, National Indigenous Affairs Agency, Land Policy and Environment Group

Aboriginal Carbon Foundation:

Shilo Villaflor - Regional Manager

ISFMI:

Catherine Monagle - Senior Programme Manager

Lenka Vanderboom - Coordinator, Women in Fire Initiative

Pollination Foundation:

Ariadne Goring - CEO

Kirsty Galloway McLean - Executive Director

Sarah Shepherd - Executive Support

We learnt from community interviews that the Tsodillo Hills enclave in north-west Botswana is home to different ethnic groups who used fire as a tool for multiple purposes. Nxishae Magdeline Kiema from Tsodilo



Hills Community spent time with community elders documenting their knowledge of fire and found that:

- The Basarwa (traditionally hunters and gathers) used fire to cultivate and protect bush foods like tubers and berries and harvest bush honey. The green leaves from shrubs were used to control the spread of fire, and communities moved on after hot fire had spread.
- The Hambukushu (small scale livelihood farmers) used prescribed burning to protect grazing areas for their livestock and for protecting grasslands for weaving resources.

The research from Tsodillo Hills found that traditionally, communities used the materials that were available at that time, today purpose-built fire equipment is used which is more practical and saves time.

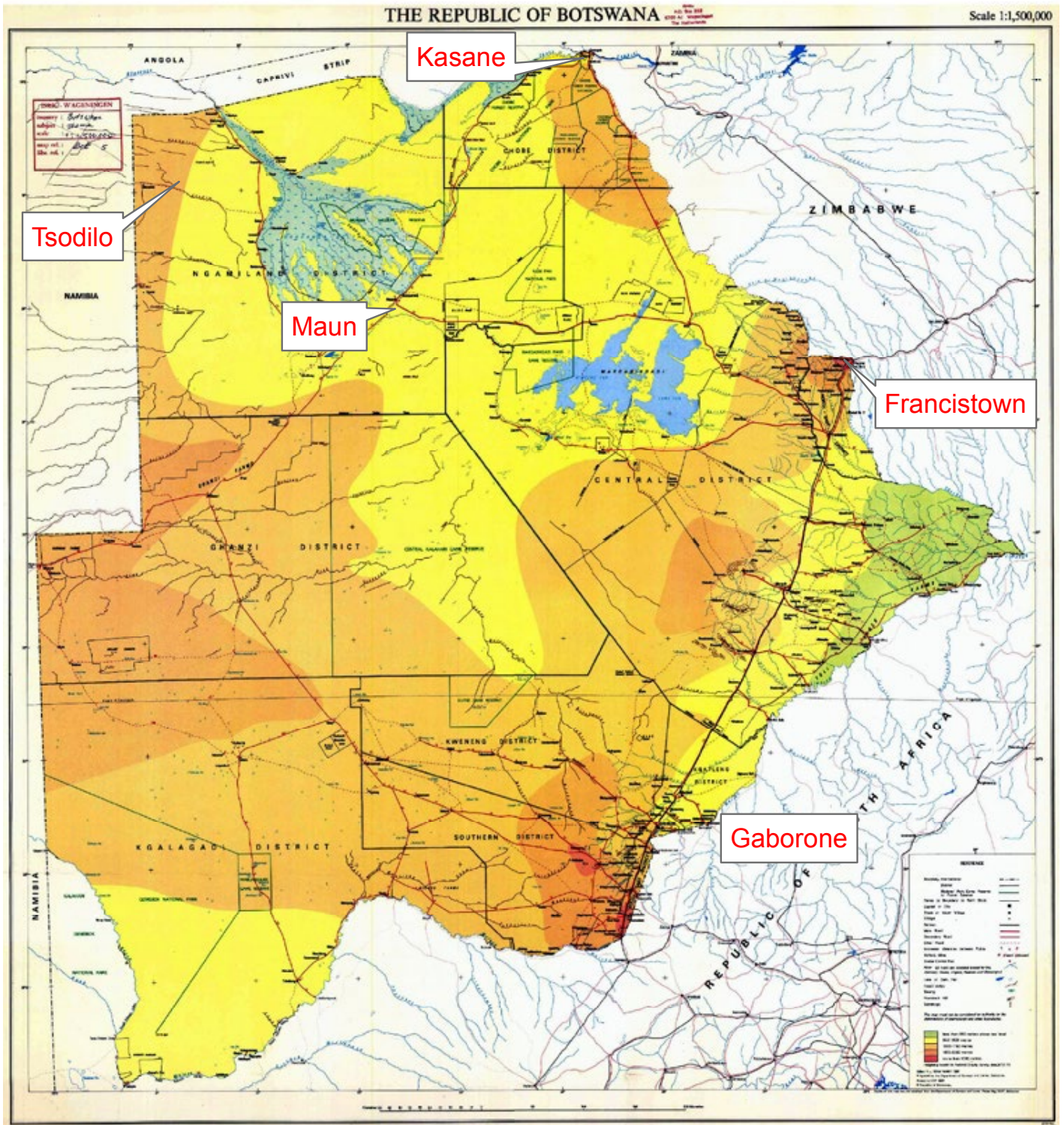
Nxishae Komtsae a community elder raised in /Oabatsha community shared that (translated content):

Early cool burning is important because there is more fuel in the late dry season, grasses are tinder dry and fires are very difficult to control, they are very hot and can only be managed during the night. In the past people used the green leaves and tree branches, today purpose-built machinery is used which is better for controlling hot fires. Modern technology should incorporate the traditional knowledge for us to manage the veldt fires in a sustainable way.

Working at the Tsodillo Hills pilot site on fire management we identified the need for resources direct to community to lead land management activities. **To do this well requires funding for community-based land managers and infrastructure like vehicles that are equipped for fire operations, ranger bases, access to satellite technology and prescribed burning safety equipment.**



ISFMI field work with women from the Tsodilo Hills community in May 2021



Communities and locations within Botswana where the ISFMI team has been working.

AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS RANGER AND INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA PROGRAMS

About 15 years ago the Australian Government piloted a community-initiated program 'Working on Country'. The program supports Indigenous communities to care for their territories in a way that aligns with their aspirations and cultural obligations.

Today, the program (now known as the Indigenous Ranger Program) supports 129 ranger groups employing 2200 people in remote and very remote communities. The workforce contributes to Australia's environmental priorities for biodiversity conservation, fire and water management, biosecurity, and cultural knowledge.

"Indigenous Ranger groups hold deep knowledge of their lands and our Government is proud to keep this knowledge in local hands for the benefit of country and those who live on it."



- Minister for Indigenous Australians,
Ken Wyatt, March 2020

Lisa Nitschke from the National Indigenous Australians Agency explained that cultural fire management is used as a tool by about 85% of Indigenous ranger groups to:

- rejuvenate food and medicine plants
- encourage plant growth
- protect threatened species
- reduce fire risks.

Cultural burning is seasonal and practiced during the cooler months after the rains, when the plants are greener and less flammable. Cool fires burn the undergrowth which reduces the fuel load and helps to reduce fire risk in the hotter dryer months.

We heard that historically men have been at the centre of the fire industry in Australia and how important it is for women to step into leadership roles. Today, about 30% of the Indigenous rangers supported by Australia's Indigenous Ranger Program are women.

Please use this link to access the [Strong Women for Healthy Country booklet](#).



The Indigenous Ranger Program is complemented by the **Indigenous Protected Area** (commonly known as an IPA) Program. An IPA is an area of Indigenous owned or jointly managed land and/or sea country, managed by Indigenous people for environmental and cultural values. Since 1997 there have been 78 IPAs declared which combined contribute ~ 50% of Australia's national reserve system.

Across northern Australia the Indigenous Ranger and Indigenous Protected Area Programs provide resources for:

- jobs and training in remote communities,
- the infrastructure needed to do early season cultural fire
- field operations and site visits
- most importantly community governance to ensure the decisions made today are building a strong and resilient future.

These programs provide the foundations and capability for communities to register and operate savanna fire carbon enterprises. The savanna fire carbon enterprises bring in additional revenue to support community led biodiversity and cultural programs which contribute to resilient and healthy communities.



VALUING MORE THAN CARBON CREDITS

Shilo from the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation (AbCF) explained how communities across northern Australia through their cultural fire work are delivering benefits beyond carbon.

The Core Benefits Verification Framework (CBVF) is a strengths based approach focusing on a peer-to-peer review that determines what each Individual communities' need's and wants are.

Some of the core benefits identified through this Framework are:

- Caring for country
- Protection of native animals, threatened species and their habitat
- Transfer of cultural stories and traditional ecological knowledge
- Community and individual empowerment, leadership, role modelling and career pathways
- Cultural revitalisation

The CBVF developed by the AbCF assists communities to identify the core benefits unique to each individual community, they choose what they value most and what data they deem most important to measure whilst protecting the Intellectual Property for each of those communities.

The CBVF uses a peer-to-peer strengths-based approach for activities that generate social, economic, and/or First Nations benefits. Nationally accredited training for verifiers is available to create local jobs, building on the experience of rangers, Traditional Owners and farmers.

The CBVF is embedded within the Queensland Government's Land Restoration Fund (LRF) as the only third party assurance of First Nations carbon project co-benefits and all projects claiming social and economic outcomes. All carbon farming projects operating within the LRF are registered with the Clean Energy Regulator.



Aboriginal Carbon Foundation Core Benefits Verification workshop with Mapoon community. © AbCF

LEARNINGS FROM THE ISFMI EXCHANGES

Modise spoke about what they have learnt since being a part of the ISFMI Botswana pilot.

“There have been many achievements from the Australia exchange done in 2019. We now know emissions [from fire in Botswana] are in large quantities which also affects biodiversity and people’s lives. Traditional burning can be used to manage and reduce the risks of the wildfires”.

“The wildfire season in Botswana starts in May, by August it is peak season - the grass dries, and we expect more fires. Our fire station is no longer operational as the satellite has stopped working, we are looking to link to other satellites or to find other work arounds to make sure we can capture how the fire is behaving.

We are still exploring development of our own fire management index and have provided training on fire management principles. We are preparing fire danger indexes to broadcast to communities, but the COVID pandemic has brought so many challenges in communicating fire risks out to the communities.

“To fight the wildfires, it doesn’t discriminate if you are a women or a man. The women are actively involved and on the front line of fire.”

– Mrs Baitshedi Edith Hill, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism



Gita Kamath, Australian High Commissioner meets Mrs Baitshedi Edith Hill - Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism, in Gaborone, Botswana, Oct 13 2021

ABOUT THE ISFMI

The International Savanna Fire Management Initiative addresses the twin challenges of rapid increase in wildfire and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. This is achieved by revitalising Indigenous fire management – fire management techniques that have been used by Indigenous peoples, over millennia - to actively manage vast tracts of land around the world resulting in reduction of GHG emissions.

The ISFMI is founded on the success of Indigenous Fire Management in Australia, which has proven that revitalisation of cultural fire reduces GHG emissions and can decrease wildfire by up to 50% in some locations.

The first phase of the initiative established global feasibility; we are now delivering proof of concept activities at pilot sites in Botswana which are promising and contribute towards vision for scale up of the technology, globally.



www.isfmi.org

ABOUT POLLINATION FOUNDATION

Pollination Foundation is a registered not for profit in Australia focused on accelerating nature-based initiatives that put community at the heart of climate solutions. Pollination Foundation is a partner to the ISFMI and facilitates the Women in Fire Initiative.



www.pollinationgroup.com/foundation

The Wifi Project is supported by:

