

Development Interventions as the Crossroads of Consciousness

A Perspective on an Intervention amongst the San of Southern Africa

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**with deepest gratitude
and
everlasting love
for
the preacher and the writer**

A Storyline

This story concerns a development intervention carried out amongst the first people of southern Africa, the San¹. It was originally written to illuminate that intervention so that this might activate renewed thinking on the part of all participants. The idea was to illustrate existing patterns in order that reflections on these might enable future paths and possibilities to be charted.

In the event, various participants and participating groups worked in various ways with their story as it was then given back to them ... and the story remains an unfolding and emerging process. For those participating in the unfolding, the story is very alive, an intimate aspect of their life's journey.

For us too, some years down the line, the story still resonates, causing us to vibrate like tuning forks in the hands of a choirmaster. As facilitators and authors, charged with a development intervention into a development intervention, our engagement with the situation has reverberated within us for the last couple of years. Something inside of us has been set alight through the engagement. Partly this may be an emotional response, but it is also, and at least equally, a response which delves into the depths of our calling as development practitioners.

We have learned, or re-learned, or had confirmed, some deep suspicions about the nature of the development intervention as crossroads of consciousness, places and moments in which new possibilities arise, possibilities of knowing and thinking in new ways, possibilities too of responding to stuck and unredeemed situations in new ways. Such challenges may never be taken up, and situations may remain as they were. But seeing and responding in new ways remains the promise and possibility and *essence* of a development intervention, rather than the immediate material outcomes and impacts which are routinely touted as the point of the intervention. Change in material circumstances will occur in concert with changes in consciousness, or not at all. Yet, routinely once again, development interventions focus on the material rather than on the way we approach our physical circumstances. As a result, too many development interventions start and end by looking in the wrong direction. At this point in our evolving history it seems, to us, to be something of an imperative that we begin to refocus our gaze by looking to our *ways of being* in situations, rather than by trying to change those situations whilst remaining essentially at the same level of consciousness as when we began. It is this re-directing of consciousness, the refocusing of our gaze, that galvanises us as possibility and imperative in this story. And in this story as quintessence of all our stories, because it concerns, so palpably and vividly, the meeting of ancient with post-modern ways of being.

Thus the story is an important one for all those concerned with social development processes and interventions, and for all those concerned with the unravelling of the socio-ecological fabric in our times. It tells of the marginalised and outcast first people of our planet and their struggle for survival, for dignity, and for development towards

¹ We are fully cognisant of the controversies surrounding the use of this name for the first peoples of Africa. In the case of these people, however, every appellation carries its own problematic. In the end, none is just or true, and will never be so unless they themselves make the choice. Until then, we use the word 'San' as being as acceptable as any.

a more hospitable and sustainable future. And it tells of a particular group of people who have chosen to work with them, and the organisations which have emerged as a result of this meeting of souls. Most significantly, it explores the patterns – both helpful and unhelpful – that have evolved between the people and their organisations as a consequence of the development work undertaken, and in doing so it highlights significant elements of social transformation, of development practice, and of organisational functioning in service of these. We hope that it provides some insight into the art of social development practice.

At this juncture in our history, with human society reaching a crossroads of meaning, the story carries a particular magnitude in that it draws us irrevocably to considerations of human consciousness, the significance of the past for the possibilities of the future, and the significance of the present for a redemption of both past and future. The struggles of the first people are our struggles, and our struggles in working amongst them and for them – against great odds – are theirs. Our futures are one. As we move into a new millennium, these first people who preceded us, and their future development, hold keys for our own development, as we do for theirs. We are, indeed, one people; human consciousness cannot be divided and fragmented, as we seem to have done, without our social fabric coming apart at the seams. This is then, above all, a story of human consciousness, as both challenge and promise of social development interventions.

Post-modernity's fractured consciousness can be helped towards wholeness if we learn what we have gained and lost; the ancient world's original wholeness, currently dissolving into despair, indignity and confusion, can be helped to differentiate consciously so that these first people can act with necessary expedience. All this we will come to.

The San, for all that they are now scrabbling in reduced circumstances for survival, were once 'hunter-gatherers', moving freely through the deserts and mountains of southern Africa. This was their land, and they belonged to the land; such was the cornerstone of their identity and culture. For these ancient hunters, the hunted animal was not an object out there, separate from themselves, to be killed only for physical sustenance, but rather was an aspect, an integral part, of themselves, in ways which it is difficult for the modern mind to adequately comprehend. If an eland, for example – the first killing of which initiated boys into manhood – was shot and wounded with a poison-tipped arrow, the hunter felt the poison coursing through his own veins. During the ensuing chase, the 'souls' of hunter and eland became entwined; the hunter, for instance, was constrained not to urinate until the eland had died, in order to ensure that the eland itself did not urinate and thus expel the poison. The hunter was also constrained to be still until the eland had died, and it became the task of others in the group to chase the animal to its place of dying. Thus the ideas of oneness, wholeness and belonging had a resonance which has dimmed for the modern person, and faded almost entirely for the post-modern. With the result that we have come to manipulate our world with a supposed impunity, something entirely foreign to the first people.

For us, it is clear that something has been gained through this shift in consciousness, and that something has also been lost. There is no doubt, for us, that hunter and hunted, self and world, are both separate as well as inseparable from each other. The

idea is raised here because it forms a central axis around which this story revolves. There are those who wish – or who are called upon for their very survival – to develop themselves, and there are those who seek to assist in the development processes of others. The two parties are separate, but their processes are inseparable, and indeed mirror each other. This is a central movement of social development practice which largely goes unremarked, and is often actively avoided. Yet it forms the hidden key to a fruitful development (or social intervention) practice. The story contained in these pages both illustrates, and is illuminated by, this idea. As such, the idea helps us towards a core understanding of the enigmas and paradoxes contained in the story, and so helps to clarify both possibilities with respect to the future evolution of the story (on the part of the actors) as well as the future evolution of development practice, and indeed – and most significantly – of consciousness itself.

THE INTERVENTION

*situating the story within its context (**The Set-Up**); providing a first overview of the situation by deepening our appreciation of the relationship between the two main groups of actors in the story (**An Initial Perspective**); a first reading of each of the actors (**The Situation of the San, An Approach to Intervention**)*

The Set-Up

The Kuru Family of Organisations (KFO) is an affiliated group of NGOs doing development work amongst the San of southern Africa. The KFO operates almost exclusively amongst the San of north-western Botswana, though it is an expanding affiliation and has relationships and tasks much further afield. At the time of this story, the KFO comprised seven organisations clustered around an eighth organisation which served as a kind of central service agency towards all the other organisations.

The KFO had emerged in the preceding years through the metamorphosis of other organisational collaborations which, growing from an initial development project started about 20 years ago, had expanded and transformed in form and shape over the years, as the work increased and relationships as well as context changed. The current organisational form and way of working arose out of the successes and challenges experienced by previous organisational forms. Many aspects had transformed over the years, including the nature of the work and the nature of relationships with the San communities amongst whom it works.

At the time of our engagement, the KFO faced many questions and conundrums about its work and its functioning and its relationships, all arising out of the strengths and weaknesses of the work it had done thus far. We were asked by the KFO to explore its current situation and the genesis of that situation, in all its complexity, in order to assist it to find new ways into the future, perhaps new angles to the relationships that were involved, to the organisational forms that were developed, to the individual destinies and choices that were involved.

This is one side of 'the set-up'. Inextricably bound up with it, in fact comprising the very reason for its existence, are the San communities themselves. There are approximately 110,000 San still living in southern Africa; of these, around half are resident in Botswana. The San once lived freely and in relative isolation throughout the vast landscape of southern Africa, as 'hunter-gatherers' (to use modernity's term for them) and without any self-identification of themselves as one people. Since the arrival of both black and white pastoral and agricultural and commercial cultures, the San have been subjected to an ignominious fate which has seen them persecuted and marginalised and divested of their lands and culture, via a vindictive cruelty that at times has amounted to genocide. In Botswana it is only in very recent years – in fact during the life of the KFO and its predecessor organisational forms, and largely as a result of the work done by this affiliation against great odds – that this situation is gradually showing some signs of transforming towards a more humane future. But there is a long way to go, and neither the path nor the goal is at all clear for anyone.

In western Botswana, situated close to the agricultural town of Ghanzi in the Kalahari desert, is the community of D'Kar. Once a large farm, the land was purchased by the Reformed Church of D'Kar for the use of the San (as well as other minorities, but the 'majority minority' was and remains the San). It was here, and through the church, that the first development project was started about 20 years ago. Since then the work has been vastly expanded – into the surrounding communities, up into north-western Botswana (north and west of, and now into, the Okavango Delta) – as well as extended into other minority communities.

The relationship between the KFO (in its current and past forms) and the communities it works among has been changing throughout these years; these shifts in relationship – encompassing related shifts in organisational form and structure – comprise a large part of the essence of the development endeavour itself whilst also forming both advantageous and disadvantageous (sometimes simply confusing, sometimes actively undermining) circumstances within which the KFO must function. All these factors form part of the parcel of conundrums and questions which this 'process of stimulating renewed thinking' was intended to address.

An Initial Perspective

The issues we were asked to address presented initially as organisation development, or simply organisational, issues. The KFO was struggling with carrying its chosen organisational form into the future, problems and contradictions had arisen, there was a questioning of the carrying capacity of the organisational form as it expands into the future, there were ambiguities of relationship (between organisations, between

organisations and communities, between individuals), of governance and leadership and decision-making and roles, and so on. There are questions as to future direction, coherence and clarity of vision and strategy. Through the early phase of our engagement all of these questions gradually became distilled into a particular underlying concern: in what way(s) could KFO be improved so that it may leave behind San communities which are able to fend for themselves? This is indeed the central question, but it continued to manifest as an issue of organisational design and functioning.

And yes, organisational design and functioning needed improving. But as with many development efforts, this aspect of the problem is foregrounded, without realising that these are secondary, rather than primary, concerns. Organisational structures and design and problems arise out of a group's intention, often unconsciously. And this intent gets obscured as questions of organisational functioning gain precedence in the seeming urgency of their need for resolution. Yet it is the intent, the re-awakening and renewal of such intent, that forms the only viable ground for a sustainable renewal of organisational structure and functioning itself.

Thinking along these lines, we can redraw the picture with which we are presented. In fact, KFO is merely the current organisational form that has been taken by a *very large development intervention undertaken with a particular group of San communities*. It is the development intervention itself that forms the primary ground of our exploration. The development intervention – *a multi-faceted, more or less coherent, long term process consisting of various practices, strategies and activities* – is the real question at stake here. A particular organisational design (and its concomitant problems) is merely one way of organising such an intervention. Renewal of the organisation will be assisted by basing it on a renewal of the intervention, else we may subject ourselves to endless and fragmented efforts at 'moving the chairs around', rather than finding the viable organisational form that responds to its reason for being there, which is the realisation of the intervention (this is what we mean by 'intent'). It is the intervention that must be foregrounded, and the organisation's current dilemmas and future possibilities read through it; though each is equally important. But precise questions concerning intervention are often sidelined as organisational issues hammer insistently at office doors. Questions concerning intent and intervention are often far more taxing. They demand far more of us in the way of change-of-practice. They require reflective space and the kind of deep consideration that enables a picture of the whole situation to emerge. It is easier, but far more fragmented and superficial and tenuous, to deal directly with the organisational issues themselves. So, in this story, we foreground intent and intervention, and read the organisation through these.

So what we have, as the main protagonists of this story, are two dominant elements. On the one hand, a very large development intervention into – or amongst – marginalised rural communities; on the other hand, a very specific set of rural communities, the San, who live a reality and set of problems that are uniquely theirs. The one element is informed by the other. It is the confluence of these two elements that sets the scene we are intervening into, largely causes the organisational complexities and contradictions, and raises issues of practice, strategy and future direction. It is the thinking through of this *confluence* – of the two elements *simultaneously* – that will point to ways forward. The emergence of a viable way

forward will occur through the transformation and development of both. Considering one without the other won't work. The one will inform the other.

The Situation of the San

What exactly is being intervened into?

The San of southern Africa were the first people of our planet. There are other aboriginal tribes scattered across the world, but all came originally from Africa. The San never set out to seek other lands; they remained where they are.

In the old days, the San lived in small bands throughout the deserts and mountains of southern Africa. They lived in more or less splendid isolation, able to travel where they wanted, able to survive off the land. They never regarded themselves as 'one people' in the sense that ethnic, religious and national groups do today; they existed as small units which moved – within their chosen 'range' – as freely as their hearts and the landscape permitted. They did not have a collective name for themselves and did not even speak a common language (though there were commonalities to their languages). They lived in a state of wholeness with respect to the land and its many diverse inhabitants – be these the four elements, the animals and plants, the rocks and sands and watercourses, the weather or the sky. They identified themselves with all that they met around them, and all that they met found meaning in their culture and way of seeing their world. Their consciousness was whole, undivided and unfragmented; it included the other within themselves, rather than separating the world into discrete 'things'. Everything was connected; they could no more harm or help anything beyond themselves than they would be doing the same to themselves. There were no divisions; spirit and matter, the individual and the group, dream consciousness and day-time consciousness, each penetrated the other, continuously, each was an angle of the other. There were few boundaries in their world, in any sense.

They lived off the land; this was their source, their parent, the first love and responsibility of their lives. The land gave or withheld, and they learned to work in collaboration and in concert with the land. No-one 'owned' anything, particularly not land, but also not particular resources, not even individual skills. They were a natural people, a people of nature. They lived freely in the sense that they did not hoard, they did not possess; they lived utterly dependent on the bounty which their environment provided or withheld. Thus both time and place were predominantly the present, the future was another world, what you had was what you had, and what was, was.

Such a description does not do justice to the complexity of San culture; it presents a nostalgic and ideal, heavenly image of a lost world and people, without remarking on the inevitable shadows which must exist in concert with the light. We will explore aspects of those shadows in a moment. But the picture given above bears at least some resemblance to a naive kind of truth. This image of a people of undivided consciousness has given rise to two responses amongst the pastoral, agricultural and commercial peoples who have either met or heard of them.

On the one hand, a growing minority of post-modern people, struggling with their

own questions of meaning, have venerated and elevated their idea of the San as an ideal, to be protected from all change as far as possible, to be held up as a way of life and a consciousness that we must strive to regain. There may be both value and danger, both wisdom and foolishness, in such veneration and striving; though there can be no doubt that we imperil ourselves the more we lose such capacity for wholeness.

On the other hand, the vast majority of people who have met with the wholeness, the joyfulness and the simple naiveté of the San, have responded – for whatever complex of psychological, cultural and economic reasons – with a cruel mixture of venom and vindictiveness. They have regarded the San as savages or primitives - even as non-people, people without wealth or cattle or property - hounded them unto death, stolen their lands, enslaved them, driven them into poverty and alcoholism. The treatment meted out to these ancient people – representatives of our original consciousness – has been unspeakably horrendous and, at the very least, literally inhuman.

This has continued much into the present time, although the forms and practices of this 'casting out' have changed over the years, as sensibilities have changed. And, of course, things are changing still. In South Africa, two groups of San have been either returned to marginal portions of their original land or been given new land. In Botswana, where a policy of non-racism often serves to hide – yet increase, through lack of redress – the marginalisation of the San, sensibilities and even policies are beginning to change for the better, and at least one can at last begin to talk honestly about and with and amongst the San (partly due to the work of the KFO intervention itself). But the San remain immeasurably impoverished, largely landless, uneducated in the modern sense, and unable to pursue their original way of life.

The San have moved, within a very few generations (in some cases only one), from their dreamlike state of oneness and grace into the situation described above. And because of such marginalisation, because they have few faculties, capacities or skills with which to compete in a modern world, because the wholeness – the lack of separation and differentiation – of their consciousness does not encourage them to enter the modern economy with its emphasis on manipulation and control, they enter this modern world in a state of utter confusion and desperation. Their original way of life, so bound up with their relationship with the land, was the source of their identity. These sources have run dry, and the San enter the new millennium devoid of a coherent identity and sense of future, with past rituals and practices and skills and understandings, even languages, rendered irrelevant and rapidly fading into obscurity.

So where to for the San? How can they enter modern life with some kind of inner resourcefulness and power, which is dependent on a sense of identity and self-worth, when their sources of identity and self-worth are either eradicated by, or in conflict with, the way of life characterised by modernity? How can they transform themselves and yet retain their sense of identity? Do they have a future as a people at all; and if not, what kind of future can they have as lost communities scrabbling for survival on the edges of the modern world? There are no easy answers to these questions, and perhaps it is wrong even to seek for hard and fast answers; perhaps development interventions can only seek to help the San respond in some kind of coherent and developed way, and allow answers to gradually emerge from a more conscious engagement and response. At the moment, the lives of the San are, by and large –

though there are a growing cadre of exceptions – governed by despair, and loss, and bewilderment, and the pain of a chaotic and unconscious transitional reality in which future possibilities are blighted and confused. They are a people in trauma and shock.

Perhaps because of this, or because of the shadow aspects of their culture of wholeness, or because they can no longer live that culture (traumatised and confined as they are on small parcels of land which do not permit their original practices of movement and hunting), the San now constitute a very particular community to work with – in terms of development interventions – and a very difficult one. The San are riddled with conflicts and jealousies. Unable to move freely out of a zone of potential conflict with neighbours, as they used to be wont to do, situations now fester unresolved. Having no sense of ownership for themselves, they struggle to recognise and respect situations which call for personal responsibility. They have a fierce resistance to leadership of any kind – the shadow side of their collective, mobile culture – failing to exercise the responsibilities of leadership, unable to grant others the space to exercise those responsibilities. They have become a highly dependent people, at times as demanding and self-absorbed as children, often able to draw on their reserves of dignity to voice a vociferous ‘No!’ yet largely unable to easily say ‘Yes!’, to find the wherewithal to move into an uncertain future with the motivation of self-reliance and personal integrity.

The San are caught between two worlds. In this place of transition – but transition towards what? – identity will be lost and confused, sometimes warped and distorted. It becomes unfair to read the past or future of San culture through the distorted lens of the present. But any intervention can only work with what is presenting itself. There is the truth, the beauty and the promise of a culture of wholeness which embodies a form of consciousness that we have lost, and that we need to regain in some renewed way (for our identity is also in a painful place of transition). There is also the shadow of this culture of utter harmony and belonging, which appears to manifest in this time of stress. The greatest and most venerated figure in San mythology is /Kaggen, or Mantis, an archetype derived from the Praying Mantis insect. Mantis is commonly regarded as the closest that San mythology comes to having a central, god-like figure. Many non-San imbue Mantis with all the (positive) traits that they attribute to their own god. But reading the San stories of Mantis themselves, other aspects emerge. We quote from Neil Bennun’s *The Broken String*: “The old man was also gloriously selfish, uncannily socially inept and one of the most spectacular cowards of world myth ... Being entirely amoral, unprincipled and deaf to advice unless he had been beaten to within an inch of his life, his stories are uniquely useful lessons in bad manners, boastfulness and immaturity. They were stories of a man who has never grown up, who does not behave like an adult. He was extremely funny. Creator, trickster, pathetic fool and tragic hero, the Mantis was a trial to his family ...” (*The Broken String* by Neil Bennun, Viking, London, 2004, pp53-54).

The San could be said to be an ‘opportunistic’ people; whether this is seen in a negative or positive light is in the eye of the beholder. The San utilise the resources that come their way, when they come; beyond this, they wait. They do not hoard or manage resources so much as use whatever is provided whenever it is provided. This is the hunter-gatherer ethos, an ethos of unconscious acceptance and harmony which does not incorporate conscious responsibility. It works for hunter-gatherers but does not easily or effectively fit with the demands of modern forms of organisation, of an

organisational culture. Unaltered and unrenewed, perhaps it does not fit with any of the demands of post-modernity.

An Approach to Intervention

Those who began this development intervention did so, at the start, with little experience but a great deal of intuitive savvy, dignified respect and an ingrained sense of human propriety. They learned as they worked, both about that work and about the San themselves. Their practice emerged more clearly the more they worked, and that practice evolved as the context changed. They did not enter with a set of rules, guidelines and procedures to follow. Yet their practice has always embodied a certain understanding of development which in turn has generated certain principles, and these have remained, and even been strengthened, throughout the life of the intervention. (Note: What follows is not based on the founders' own analysis, but on our own reading of the intervention based on our observations.)

Clearly development interventions – particularly, but not only, in situations of such complexity – are of very long and indeterminate duration. They are a process, not a procedure. There is no sense here of rigid time-bound objectives and goals; the intervention engages with real human situations and is therefore responsive and emergent, in line with the situation itself. Engagement means intimacy, a getting involved and living amongst. Allowing, facilitating, enabling the situation to evolve through, as the poet Yeats put it “Protecting, till danger past, with human love”. Community, friendship, relationship, emergence – all these take the place of narrow technique, of instrumentalism and managerialism; rigid planning never outweighs responsiveness.

From the outset the intervention was intended to work with and alongside, never on or for, the San. The intention was to accompany the San in their own development process, in their struggles with identity, with their situation, and with their context. Never to take up political cudgels on behalf of the San but to assist them to develop their own political and economic place in society. The intention – though the boundaries have inevitably become confused from time to time, given the nature of social development – was never to form a political organisation either with or on behalf of the San but always to form a development NGO (or NGOs) which would accompany the San with respect to their development process. To ‘ensure that the San have the power to look after themselves on the ground, within their communities and context’.

The development process was recognised as complex, chaotic and non-linear, and confusions, contradictions, set-backs and conflicts were to be expected. Given this volatile nature of development, interventions should – rather than engage in rigid planning which would not permit of responsive flexibility – search for certain elements (‘stabilisers’) which could serve as points of rest and balance and commonality within the chaos of the process. Relatively stable organisations were considered as one such stabiliser.

These organisations would not be ‘external’ to the San, free-floating ‘ex-pat’ NGOs working with the San; the San were not to be dependent on others, even those others

whose intentions were positive. On the contrary, they were to be completely integrated within the San communities. They were therefore to be owned by the San, and governed by them; they were to belong to the San, to be wholly 'their' organisations. The San were to have their own development NGOs, directed towards improving their own welfare, towards enabling them to 'fend for themselves'.

Thus two principles could be said to form the backbone of the intent of this development intervention, the fundamentals of the underlying approach. The first is the principle of 'embeddedness'. All aspects of the development intervention must be 'embedded' within the communities it serves. Thus the San must own and govern and to as large extent as possible staff their own development NGOs. Further, staff – development practitioners – must live amongst the communities with which they work, ideally even be drawn from those communities.

The second is the principle of holism; this intervention is a holistic development intervention. It incorporates all aspects of the communities' lives, and assumes that all these aspects influence and inform each other. Thus, culture and economics and politics; thus individual and organisational and community activity; thus skills, techniques, understanding and ideas; thus emerging relationships and planned objectives; thus processes and products; thus self-development and economic development; thus history, current reality and future potential; thus identity, culture and context. This development intervention tries not to divide things up into piecemeal projects or 'deliverables', and it tries to keep the different aspects of the intervention as closely linked as possible, avoiding fragmentation and division. It means that the development practitioner engages with the whole life of the person or community they are relating to, rather than seeing them as 'targets' of a particular 'project'. It implies an emphasis on relationship and intimacy. An unintrusive and small 'footstep'; a light touch. It implies a process approach of sufficiently long duration (especially given the intricate and almost impossible situation that is being intervened into).

Dilemmas and Paradoxes

Such are the intentions, the governing principles. Clearly, and inevitably, this was not happening everywhere. Partly this may have been a consequence of ineffective application, partly a consequence of outer constraint, partly a consequence of unrecognised shadow aspects of the original intent gaining precedence. So the intervention had arrived at dilemmas and paradoxes which weakened its effectiveness, at times questioning its integrity, and certainly giving rise to the many questions about future direction which were then being asked. A very brief look at some of the largest of these issues follows.

- * The intervention's greatest impact to date has been with regard to the external context within which the San communities live, rather than with those communities themselves. The political and cultural environment in Botswana is beginning to shift towards a more humane appreciation of the San and their issues, largely due to the work of the KFO. But the San themselves have not developed 'sufficiently' towards self-reliance, a sense of responsibility, the development of relevant capacity or a new appreciation of identity.

- * The kind of intervention outlined above – responsive and holistic – requires that practitioners and organisations constantly learn from their practice, reflect on their experience, build their understanding, in a collaborative and collective fashion. This was happening to too small a degree in the KFO. There was little space and time, few procedures, systems or processes, almost an absence of practices, amongst the practitioners and organisations, which could promote learning. Instead, there was an emphasis on doing, so that an absence of collective and coherent vision, strategy, rationale and understanding, and sense of common practice, was beginning to make itself felt. A loss of the *sense* of KFO, of what holds it together.
- * In similar fashion, there was not enough coherence and consistency around the question of goals, impact and measurement. Much is done without adequate assessment as to whether it had worked or not, or whether it was having the desired effect or not. The art of holistic facilitation requires a very subtle and intelligent reading of situation and effect, given that this is constantly shifting and not outlined as a rigid set of objectives. There appeared too little such reading taking place; or what was being read was often ignored and avoided. The result was that many activities and projects continued on well-worn paths that were not necessarily proving very effective (and what was it, anyway, to be effective?). Concomitantly there may have been too little strategic thinking taking place.
- * The KFO has grown ever larger and larger, requiring more and more resources, more and more management capacity, more and more specialised input and expertise. It is becoming ever more reliant on outside sources of these things, in the way of finance, professionals, and managers. Whilst the KFO is growing in this way, the communities it serves are not sufficiently keeping pace. So the resources for the development intervention grow faster and bigger than the communities that the intervention is meant to serve. The KFO runs the risk of transgressing its own boundaries – an unintrusive and small ‘footstep’; a light touch. More being done ‘for’ the San than ‘with’ the San. The NGOs move further and further away from being owned and managed by the San. Every attempt to reverse this trend seems to exacerbate it.
- * One of the biggest controversies within the KFO and its constituent communities concerns whether the San really own, govern or lead the KFO (including all member organisations) – as the KFO claims – or whether they do so in name only. There is controversy as to whether the San *should* own the KFO, whether they are able to do so, the extent to which they are encouraged or lead or capacitated to do so. There is controversy over whether the San have *ever* owned the KFO (in its various phases of growth) or whether the question of ownership, governance and leadership is one that has grown larger in recent years, and will continue to grow more contentious the larger and more ‘expert’ the KFO becomes.
- * The question of leadership proves to be far broader than the question of ownership by the San. As within the communities themselves, leadership within the KFO appears to be drifting, perhaps somewhat incoherent, not sufficiently consequent. A line seems to have become lost, a collective vision missing, a strategic reasoning absent. Too little challenge and critique. There is much thinking taking place, in

places incredible energy, but it appears fragmented. Perhaps not enough *thinking through*. And the real leadership is often hidden behind the facade of organisational structures, perhaps, or inside the breasts of those who would wish to encourage others to lead. A climate of mistrust and suspicion has arisen. Not only between individuals, or between groups or even communities, but between member NGOs, and between member NGOs and the 'service' or 'lead' NGO, and within and between various different governing structures and levels.

So much had and was being achieved, even within all the areas mentioned above. Nevertheless, the questions and controversies were growing.

To an extent the dilemmas and paradoxes are inevitable. The intervention finds itself, unavoidably, in the midst of a set of seeming impossibilities. Entering a confused, traumatised, poverty stricken and dependent community, caught between the pincers of an overwhelmingly difficult context, the development intervention itself carries the energy, sense of responsibility, leadership, expertise, capacity, resource-base, that it is trying to facilitate in the community. How then to resolve the problem of dependence? Every attempt to do so seems to entrench the gap between the two actors (or elements) of the story. Every attempt to facilitate for independence seems to foster dependence. There is a circle, a pattern here, which was not being broken through. And the development intervention itself has begun to take on the characteristics of the community it intervenes into – reluctant and hidden leadership, mistrust and suspicion, lack of identity and vision, insufficient responsibility. It almost seems impossible to break through. Yet this is the very task we have all set ourselves – to break through.

There may be a way to break through, or ways to break through. Not an answer (or answers), but responses, coherent with each other and with the situation, which may begin to enable real answers to emerge. And to get there, the development intervention itself will have to face the demands of its own change. There may be a certain falling asleep with respect to the underlying patterns in the situation. Also to the real implications of the understanding and principles that guide the development intervention. This has also been inevitable; the situation is almost too complex to face. But, facing it, new insights may emerge which will affect practice, organisation, community and the consciousness of all concerned.

MAKING A READING

As we have seen, the presenting problem which called for our engagement had shifted and become both more complex and more dynamic. Originally the problem was seen as primarily one of organisational structure, and of organisational capacity in the narrowest sense. Some in-depth observation revealed a complex set of dynamics which formed an intricate network – almost like a spider’s web – of interlinked issues, inseparable in fact, many of which had more to do with relationship, understanding, underlying intent and consciousness than with organisational structure and functioning. The latter were indeed debilitated, but the problem had to be worked with on a different level.

However, simple presentation of the interlinked issues was clearly not going to be enough to understand the underlying dynamics enough to begin the process of transforming them. We had to find the key to unlocking the complex of factors. How had they emerged? What were the generating factors which had enabled the situation to arise? If we could find these then we would have, perhaps, the beginning of a handle on the situation.

And so we go in search of them. We have observed, and certain aspects have revealed themselves. The facts are not going to change, but perhaps our understanding of them, the way we see them, can deepen.

We have not, as yet, remarked much on the very remarkable achievements of this development intervention into the life of the San. We have focused on the issues that have arisen as hindrances to moving forward. In fact the achievements have been many and significant. They need to be outlined for their own sake, but more than this, they need to be outlined because they, just as much as the issues that have arisen, may contribute to the search for the factors in this social situation which are active in forming it as it has emerged thus far. And they may give us greater insight into strategic possibilities and necessities with respect to the KFO and its work.

(Of course each individual NGO has its own significant achievements to note; we write here only generally, of KFO achievements as a whole. Indeed, this is the line we have taken with outlining the conundrums and paradoxes as well – they arise out of detailed observation of individual NGOs and their relationships, but, because the detail may

become overwhelming, we try to render only the overall – yet very specific – picture here.)

What has Been Gained?

The situation of the San has already been outlined. Clearly, development work with the San was always going to be fraught with difficulty and contradiction, and was always going to be long term. Nevertheless, over these years what has been gained is huge indeed, perhaps inconceivably vast, certainly incomprehensible to anyone who is not intimate with the situation (and perhaps even more incomprehensible to those that are, given the impossibility of the task). Quite simply, in certain respects the entire situation has changed, and a different world has taken its place. The situation of the San in terms of poverty and identity and a comprehensible future remains pretty much as it has always been, but certain things have changed which may form the basis for sustainable change into the future. In such a situation, within 20 years, this is significant indeed.

In what follows we note certain gains very briefly and then highlight two areas which are particularly significant for our understanding of the keys which may unlock thinking about the future. Yet it will also be seen throughout what follows that there are no successes (or solutions) which do not generate new problems.

Simply maintaining, renewing and improving long term funding relationships within a context in which the cause of the San is marginalised as much by the donor world as by the San's more immediate neighbours, has been a notable achievement, and has come through incredibly hard work on the part of those who have been able to maintain these relationships. (Yet would these relationships ever be capable of being maintained by the San?)

More and more communities – largely, but increasingly not only, San – have been positively impacted on by the KFO. The KFO has expanded its field of operation significantly, and continues to do so, and maintains the energy and commitment to reach out to more and more communities (and to do this with respect to southern Africa as a whole). Given the very slow and difficult nature of the work, the many contradictions involved, the resistance to change and the overwhelming levels of dependence and lack of self-image and responsibility on the part of the communities, this staying power and maintenance of energy and of a forward-looking approach is in itself a huge achievement which is almost impossible to overestimate. The enthusiasm and optimism of the KFO is possibly its greatest gift. (And yet, is it possible that such gift also generates a new kind of dependency?)

In the central community of D'Kar, poverty for a large group has been alleviated and the quality of life of many people in the community has improved considerably. (Yet, more resources attract more dependants and therefore increasing poverty again on the fringes of this community. There are thriving businesses such as shops, cattle syndicates and shebeens; and there are also other indicators of poverty alleviation: for example new houses being built, children being sent to private schools. However, to a large extent these economic developments are still dependent on the KFO, and have caused

such imbalances in the society that new problems are caused.)

The work that the KFO has done (in partnership with the government), at Tsodilo Hills (to develop it as a heritage site working in collaboration with communities), has been highly acclaimed, and, according to one respondent, should “serve as a template for the rest of the country”. (The Tsodilo Hills, hitherto neglected, are a kind of Ayers’ Rock, Wailing Wall or Dome of the Rock for the San.) Other impacts have been fewer drop-outs from school, more graduates due to scholarships and support, and in-service training of San, more fluency in English, and knowing how to present themselves due to exposure in such situations. Also San owned programmes and projects ranging from wildlife and conservation tourism to small-scale agriculture (though these are all in their infancy, and enjoy significant support from KFO).

And so to the two areas which we mentioned earlier. First: The most significant gains and changes have been made with respect to the context within which the San live. Significant political and policy shifts have occurred, or are occurring, in Botswana and in South Africa – with respect to land and educational and language issues, all of which impact directly on the future identity and sustainability of the San as a people. The entire political and cultural environment is changing as a direct result of the work of the KFO over the years. Now, San issues are on national agendas; now there are policy debates and conferences and conversations that take place not merely about the San but with the San. Given the attitude towards San that has existed – and largely still does – within Botswana culture and politics, these achievements not only reflect remarkably on the KFO but set the possibilities for the future. In this regard, Kuru has played a significant role in the support it has given to resourcing certain NGOs which are helping to build the political aspirations of the San. It is difficult to imagine this aspect going much further without the KFO.

However, there is an ironic twist to these gains. The idea behind the development intervention has always been to assist the San with their own development, never to work on behalf of the San to achieve contextual shifts for them. Yet the most significant achievements to date have been *on behalf of* the San with respect to their *context*, while the impact of working with the San on their own issues of capacity and culture and self-image and level of dependency and lack of personal responsibility and levels of poverty – within their own communities and through their own organisations – have been less successful KFO achievements. The development intervention has not really succeeded in empowering the San in this sense, while it has succeeded in impacting on their context and in building the confidence of certain individuals to impact on their context.

This is not to say that there have not been enormous gains made in terms of ‘San pride’. (And this brings us to the second of the two areas indicated). On the contrary, over time these displaced and marginalised people, driven to the edges of their countries and hounded as some kind of malevolent enemy, have been able to grow a remarkable sense of pride in simply being San. An intentional reconnection with their history and culture has enabled an emerging identity to begin to establish itself in many individuals and across communities. With such a growing sense of self, much is possible. Without it, everything is cosmetic. Through its activities and strategies, the KFO has contributed towards the development of pride and a stronger sense of identity within the San.

In spite of the constraints, there are individuals who are gaining significant capacity and becoming educated in various ways and fields. This work is inevitably slow and painstaking, but it is emerging as a direct result of the time and commitment given to the mentoring, exposure and education of individual San who sit on Boards or who work as deputy coordinators within the KFO or who have achieved positions of responsibility within their NGOs. There is an enormous amount that has been achieved in terms of the development of San voices to address their circumstances; of San engagement with political issues; of San becoming their own spokespeople – as a result of the KFO. These achievements form the basis of the future of the KFO. Indeed, more and more, San leaders are being called upon to be spokespeople around issues relating to the San; to such an extent that this is beginning to cause some stress amongst those leaders. Nevertheless, it is a clear indication of success.

Most significantly, the remark was made – by an informed outsider who has been able to observe the development intervention and the development of the San over very many years – that a comparison between the current reality and the situation of the San those many years ago indicates remarkable achievement against impossible odds – particularly in the realm of finally having San with whom one can really engage around San issues; San who are engaged with their people's issues, who have strong and intelligent opinions, who are able to see future possibilities and necessities. Such achievement, of course, is accompanied by a great deal of pain and stress for the individual San involved, so much so that the struggle accompanied by the change in their consciousness and way of being necessitated by these gains is immediately and palpably observable. This pain is ongoing, and demands sacrifice and loss, uncertainty and confusion. And these must never be underestimated. And yet, in spite of all of this, "a few people are engaged, and have opinions".

Yet, in spite of the almost miraculous and clearly positive nature of the above observations, none of this in fact goes much beyond the point noted earlier, that: "The development intervention has ... succeeded in ... building the confidence of certain individuals to impact on their context". Whilst some individuals have certainly gained the confidence and ability to turn outwards towards their debilitating context – whilst struggling against the alcoholism and sometimes shattering stress levels accompanied by this struggle within themselves – there has been little change within the communities themselves, little change within the culture of these communities in terms of its own constraining factors, little change in the life circumstances of the San and in their inability to look to their own affairs. Earlier reference was made to the shadow aspects of the San culture of wholeness, perhaps exacerbated because they can no longer live that culture freely. These shadow aspects include communities which are riddled with conflicts and jealousies and in which debilitating situations and relationships fester unresolved, poisoning the entire tenor of a community. They include the inability to take personal responsibility, and the refusal to allow others to do so. They include a fierce resistance to leadership of any kind, a failure, therefore, to exercise the responsibilities of leadership or to allow others the space to do so. The shadow aspects of their culture render them a highly dependent people, as demanding and self-absorbed as children. It is worth quoting here a sentence used before: "... often able to draw on their reserves of dignity to voice a vociferous 'No!' yet largely unable to easily say 'Yes', to find the wherewithal to move into an uncertain future with the motivation of self-reliance and personal integrity".

Thus, while having an effect on the context, and enabling individuals to gain some capacity to respond to that context, these gains made by the development intervention over the years are far from being adequate to effecting the real changes needed to enable the San to – in response to the underlying intent of the KFO – fend for themselves (in a radically altered environment).

What has been gained is nothing less than miraculous, yet it is clearly far from enough. Are aspects of these gains even militating against the achievement of others? Are the gains that are really being sought in fact pipe dreams and idealistic visions, or is there something in the KFO that, if understood and shifted, could help to achieve more than hitherto?

A Line of Argument

Naming the issues as we have – even though we mention that the issues are all interconnected – is not sufficient to enable the KFO to begin to address them in a meaningful and coherent manner. The tendency is still to treat these issues individually, as problems to be solved in their own terms. But in fact all these issues have been generated somewhere, which is to say they are outcomes of repeated behaviours; outcomes of behaviour patterns ... and we look in the wrong direction when we try to solve these problems individually, piecemeal, superficially. Going deeper, we may begin to see that patterns are formed through the (repeated) *way we do things*. In other words, it is the *quality* of our behaviour, *how* we do things *repeatedly*, that results in the situations that we have to then deal with. Attempts to solve problems on the same level as they manifest may work for a while but the ‘solutions’ will rapidly become unsustainable because they have not dealt with the underlying patterns that are giving rise to these problems in the first place.

We therefore, in what follows, outline the narrative thread of an argument which attempts to reveal, to make visible, these underlying patterns and realities which have given rise to the emerging issues and challenges facing KFO at this time. It is our belief that being able to see, to understand and to make sense of the underlying story is the most powerful way of enabling social situations – in this case the KFO and the San communities – to make conscious choices about their future. The narrative thread – which appears to us as arising palpably out of our observations, much as the meaning of a word arises from a particular ‘reading’ of the individual letters and the meaning of a sentence arises from a particular reading of the arrangement of the words – goes somewhat as follows.

There is a phenomenon which we have witnessed; a phenomenon which suggests to us that in this particular situation, each time the KFO has attempted to address a particular problem, rather than resolving this problem, it becomes exacerbated. The problem becomes further entrenched. Fritz Perls, the father of Gestalt therapy, refers to this phenomenon as the “paradoxical theory of change”. He indicates that when one tries to change a situation through merely modifying the behaviour, that particular behaviour entrenches itself ever more deeply. The essence of Gestalt therapy is *awareness*:

becoming aware of the situation, understanding it, seeing it, so that it can begin to shift – primarily through this understanding.

There are two elements to this story: on the one hand there are the San communities – those who have been violated and abused and marginalised, and who have become fragmented and dependent through having to forego their way of life to make way for modern and shifting realities. On the other hand there is the intervention into San communities through the KFO. The intention of the development intervention is to enable the San to adapt to a modern world, to be able to live in it and to be able to fend for themselves in this context. For the KFO it has been important that the intervention itself be San-owned, so that interventions are not done *for* or *to* the San, but rather *by* and *with* the San. In order that the intervention be San-owned, it has needed to operate in such a way that its way of working is not foreign to San communities. In this way, it is grounded in the two fundamental principles of embeddedness and holism. Many of the guiding and generative patterns which have given rise to both gains and current issues were carried as seeds within these principles. The principles, which have guided the intervention, have proved to be invaluable – not to mention morally incontestable and radically authentic – but at the same time they carry the seeds of their own limitations. This becomes apparent as we begin to penetrate an underlying dynamic which lies at the heart of this intervention.

We find that these two – the ‘intervention’ (KFO) and those into which it is intervening (the San communities) – are mirror images of one another. In a variety of ways, they reflect the characteristics of one another. They have, in a certain sense, become one, where the issues, the developmental challenges facing the San communities are simultaneously facing the development agency, the KFO. This phenomenon is an expression of the shadow side of embeddedness wherein the KFO appears to some extent to have lost its differentiated identity; where it has lost consciousness of its role and its own development trajectory. The two have lost their separate and differentiated identities. The KFO, through immersion in the principles of embeddedness and holism, has taken on within itself the very characteristics which it has sought to address in the San communities: it now reflects within itself many of these very issues. We turn to look at some of these now.

Dependency

The San are dependent on factors outside of themselves. The development intervention was set up in order to encourage and enable the San to become more independent, so that they may take control of their own destiny. In order to do this, responsive to an emerging situation, the development intervention itself has had to grow, expand, to build its capacity. As it has done so, it has grown ever more sophisticated and complex. Rather than enabling itself to be owned by the communities, it has thereby had to become more and more independent of the communities. As this has happened, the communities have grown more dependent on it for the resources it brings, including finances, perspectives and expertise. Thus the San remain dependent as the development intervention grows more complex in its attempts to reduce that dependency.

In order to resolve issues or attract more resources, there has been continual expansion

throughout the life of the development intervention, and especially now within the era of the KFO (not least because of dominant donor needs for continually new attractions). These attempts to resolve issues then lead to more expansion. The original idea was an 'unintrusive light touch': simple NGOs that could be owned by the San. But in pursuit of such a situation the intervention has become large, more complex, and has to a large extent lost its 'light touch'. And this dilemma remains unresolved. More and more energy and finance (with long term sustainability implications) goes into the attempt to resolve the dilemma, and the result is that the dilemma grows rather than resolves itself. And more and more energy and finance is needed to resource the attempt to resolve the dilemma.

Within the KFO, Letloa – the 'lead' or 'service' NGO – has been set up to assist member NGOs to focus on their work rather than on extraneous issues like fundraising and expert input, and this has certainly helped these NGOs to survive and, in specific instances, to focus. But the idea has also been that these NGOs become independent organisations able to fend for themselves (and able to be owned by the San, thereby needing Letloa less). However, one of the real dangers of this strategy, to some extent visible in the KFO, is that they have become dependent on Letloa for their very survival. Inevitably, this creates ambivalent feelings towards Letloa. But whether the response is one of excessive gratitude or resentment, these are each in their own way indications of dependence on a person or an organisation outside of oneself. Thus the pattern of the development intervention creating dependency with respect to the San through its very attempts to foster independence is repeated within the KFO as a relationship between Letloa and the member NGOs.

This pattern can be seen manifested perhaps most strongly in the founder *de facto* leaders of the development intervention, including the director of Letloa, and the various levels of dependency on them.

The pattern starts and ends with the issue of dependency; this seems to be the kernel of the dynamic. Not just in terms of relationships between the various actors, but in the pattern's very essence. What we mean here is that the development intervention appears to have evolved a pattern of dependency which has ingrained itself into the very fibre of the intervention. The pattern has become unconscious. In order to break through, we have to first make it conscious.

Lack of identity, lack of coherence

In the old days the San never saw themselves as a people with an ethnic identity, certainly not with a 'national' or 'regional' identity. They did not have one name for themselves, as we have applied to them now. They were small and scattered groupings of people, comprising different languages, and they never felt the need for 'identifying' themselves. With the advent of modernity, and their struggle for a viable and sustainable future, they are having to learn to 'cohere', use a common name for themselves, find an identity which can carry them into the future. But all this seems to go 'against the grain' of their culture; they struggle to cohere, to come together as one people across the region (or even within a relatively small geographical area).

We experienced a similar phenomenon within the KFO as a whole. Issues of lack of

coherence among the family, lack of a shared identity, vision, strategy and purpose, lack of a cohesive organisational form which would hold members together in terms of practice, culture, accountability, future striving – all these issues are important for the KFO to take into account. The KFO appears to hold together as the San held together, through an unarticulated though deep commonality of feeling. If the KFO is trying to help the San establish a new sense of identity for themselves, it – as KFO – needs to have a more articulated and coherent sense of its own identity.

A culture of informality

Formality of structure, hierarchy, relationship or plan plays no part in San life; they are not an 'organised' people in the sense that the word is used today, and this is why they struggle so deeply with issues of organisation, with the task of building or owning organisations. The San are, perhaps more than any other people, an informal people who flow with circumstances – including relationships – and do not try to frame or structure or control their world.

It is precisely because of this understanding of the nature of San life that the KFO has made choices to be accessible, open and informal in their functioning, and in their relationships. This choice makes much sense, and there are many very positive spin-offs from this. In this informality, there is a palpable warmth, an immediacy, a fluidity and flexibility, a friendliness, a spirit of interconnectedness, an interest, a sense of doors being open rather than closed, that characterises the KFO. Rules and regulations, procedures and mechanisms, formality of relationship and function and role – all these barely exist.

And we see the evidence of informality (in both its positive and negative aspects) everywhere we look, from means of communication (or the lack thereof) to relationships between and within organisations; from accountability concerns with respect to individuals and organisations to decision-making which is often not overt; from the roles various different people in different situations adopt to the lack of coherence as to method and practice and goal.

The very way the KFO has been set up is a model of informality, without formal contracts and agreements between members and between them and Letloa, without a clear leadership or management or coordination structure, without criteria for accountability or methods for assessing these, without clarity of purpose and practice. Informality is, indeed, promoted as a virtue within the KFO – though clearly it has disadvantages. Either way, it has become a way of life (as it is with the San).

A culture of informality has been there since the beginning; informality has been promoted as a way of remaining close to, and accessible by, the communities. The fear was always that the formal demands of organisational life would distance the NGOs from the communities. And there is virtue and truth in this notion, and there is great value to be gained from it, and great harm that may result from becoming too formal. There is a sense of ease within the KFO and the intervention which makes it a wonderful place to be in and work out of, and it does keep the KFO closer to the communities than it otherwise might be. It can – and does – feel holistic and responsive. However, there are great dangers to informality if it is taken too far. A

certain lack of rigour and discipline may creep into the intervention. And indeed it has: at this time, the KFO is suffering from its current culture of informality – more than thriving on it. The chances of creating unhealthy patterns are much stronger without sufficient formal scaffolding in appropriate places.

Conflict and mistrust

First amongst these is a sense that conflict and mistrust are growing. Much of this has to do with changing life circumstances for the San, but this is precisely what the KFO is set up to address. Despite fantasies to the contrary which might still live for those who have idealistic imaginations of the original San way of life, conflict and mistrust have become a reality amongst and within San communities. At times it feels as though mistrust has become a first, rather than a last, resort for anyone for whom things do not work out quite the way they would wish.

There is clearly mistrust within the KFO. Much of this mistrust (which exists in most organisations) could be addressed by building appropriate mechanisms for transparency, accountability and decision making. This – of necessity – requires a certain formality. It is important to differentiate between where informality is healthy and appropriate, and where it lends itself toward the fomenting of mistrust in the organisation.

Leadership and power

The San, to repeat a line used previously, “have a fierce resistance to leadership of any kind – the shadow side of their collective, mobile culture – failing to exercise the responsibilities of leadership, unable to grant others the space to exercise those responsibilities”. This forms an essential aspect of San culture, dovetailing neatly with its informality. Personal responsibility for leadership, or leadership as personal responsibility, is not a natural part of San culture. It is the collective that must be responded to, not the individual. For the San of old, this may well have been advantageous and, at the very least, reasonable and coherent as a way of life. For the current San communities it has led to a situation fraught with tension, excuse, avoidance and mistrust. Many San are seen as wanting power and privilege and benefits for themselves – not for the community – and without exercising the requisite sense of restraint and responsibility. Thus issues of leadership and power have become veiled behind a tendency to deny this power. The development intervention has specifically set out to shift these dynamics, but to some extent it suffers from the same pattern.

One aspect of this pattern results from the embeddedness of the San in the NGOs. Thus there are San on the Boards of NGOs – founders and others – who are seen to wield power for their own benefit, and who are not seen to exercise the kind of responsibility which such positions entail. Too little is real leadership combined with the privilege of power; and this problem is not really addressed within the KFO, it is shied away from, as though addressing it might antagonise the very San leaders who are necessary for the KFO to be owned by the San. On the other hand, some leading Board members refrain from speaking their minds because they are also staff members within the KFO, and speaking directly may endanger their position as staff. There is thus both a

problem of power and of powerlessness amongst the San leadership of the KFO. This problem, as a pattern, runs throughout the KFO.

The pivotal location with respect to issues of leadership and power within the KFO resides in the persons of the founders of the development intervention (including the then director of Letloa). From the beginning the founders have not wanted to assume the mantle of leadership; it goes against the grain of their entire approach to their work, which is to encourage others to lead. They have been self-effacing and humble to a fault. But in this, the reality of their power (precisely because of the informality that exists within the KFO), is in fact hidden; it has never lessened. After all these years, the development intervention is still seen by most to stand or fall according to the presence or absence of the founders. This reality, combined with the patterns of dependence and informality running through the KFO, makes it difficult for the KFO to trust its own capacity, thus further entrenching the need for, and the perception of, the founders' leadership.

This is not in any sense to accuse the founders of seeking this situation for themselves; this would be to entirely miss the point of our argument. Quite the contrary, in fact – it is their refusal to recognise and accept their own power that has led to this situation. For it seems as though the founders have unconsciously mirrored San culture in this regard – their refusing to want to acknowledge or take leadership renders the KFO with a lack of shared direction and purpose and identity, just as the San communities themselves. And this culture of (non) leadership, of leadership by default rather than by choice, of denial of power, of lack of true accountability, runs throughout the KFO. And contributes to the lack of rigour and to a climate of mistrust and confusion.

There is something further that lies underneath all of this. Everything that the founders have done, they have done for and out of love. But this very love may have led them to give more than was warranted, may have led them to foster dependence rather than challenge it; thus perhaps increasing the dependence of those others, rather than decreasing it. Thus, once again, revealing and contributing to the underlying pattern, in which *the attempt to resolve the problem results in the problem becoming more entrenched.*

Leadership Capacity

There has not been sufficient attention paid to the activity of building leadership capacity within the KFO. Once upon a time, in the early days of the development intervention, this activity, though pursued informally, occupied much time and formed the main thrust of the intervention. But this has long since disappeared, and no-one – not the San communities, not the San Board members or staff, not the coordinators, not the expat staff – is receiving the benefit of direct strategic capacity building with respect to leadership. The intervention appears to have fallen out of rhythm with its own main thrust – for without building leadership in the sense of personal responsibility and capacity, the underlying dynamics of the situation will – to a greater or lesser extent – remain unconscious; and it is this very lack of consciousness that feeds the underlying dynamics.

Is there a Way to Break Through?

If the above described dynamic of dependence is indeed at the heart of the repeated behaviours which, as patterns, have become the generative (and largely unconscious) routines that have resulted in the network of interlinked issues which now holds the development intervention captive, how then can the circularity of the pattern be broken through?

Only by becoming conscious of it, of the KFO's own roles in it, and beginning to do things differently. It is the *quality of response* that must change. Only by matching the behaviour of the KFO with that which they hope to engender in others, will this development intervention realise its promise. If the KFO and all those who work for it begin to awake to the patterns that bind, then the intervention may begin to break through. Indeed, *such awakening is the very point of the intervention in the first place.*

In reality, the KFO is neither entirely embedded within the communities it serves, nor is it entirely external to them. It is neither entirely owned by those communities, nor is it entirely "an external professional development enterprise run by outsiders". In fact it is both. To straddle such seemingly opposite positions, instead of denying either the one or the other, is the most difficult realisation and task that the KFO has in front of it. Yet the challenge to straddle the contradiction is a significant way in which to focus its energies onto viable strategic choices.

Every facilitator of development processes must be able to be both inside the process (participating and engaged) and outside the process (observing and choosing) at one and the same time. Such is the nature of *critical engagement*, and without such critical engagement the facilitator is less than helpful. Without such critical engagement, the facilitator is either too submerged in the dynamics of the situation (in which case they can contribute little) or too distant from the real dynamics at play (in which case too their contribution can only be minimal). The art of the development intervention that the KFO is trying to practise is to be able to be both inside and outside at the same time, to be an insider and an outsider, to have both an insider and an outsider consciousness.

The KFO has, by and large, lost this capacity to be inside and outside at the same time. In the urge to embed itself it has become embroiled inside a set of contradictions. Rather than seeking means to avoid the contradictions, they will have to be embraced as the very essence of the intervention itself. As one example of these, we mention again the dilemma between the formal and informal dimensions of the KFO: it is not that the KFO needs to choose one *in place of* the other, but that they both need to be embraced, and become part of the interaction and structure of the KFO in appropriate or relevant ways.

The KFO will have succeeded in its endeavours with the San when they (the San themselves) are able to be both inside and outside of their situation at the same time, when they are able to be themselves and yet see themselves from the outside, at the same time. This is the essence of the kind of self-consciousness which the San will have to embrace if they are to develop their own identity in the face of new circumstances, if they are to develop personal responsibility and the kind of leadership which will enable them to carve a new and sustainable identity and fend for themselves in a changed environment. This is the fundamental intention of the development intervention.

To do this, the KFO too will have to learn to be both insiders and outsiders at the same time. The question of identity applies as much to the KFO as it does to the San. The KFO cannot afford to simply and only mould itself to the ways of the San and to regard the San as its teachers. The KFO must become very clear about what *it* brings to the situation, about its own identity and form of practice and strategic intelligence.

So to the development intervention's underlying principles of *embeddedness* and *holistic responsiveness* must be added *consciousness* (in the sense of self-consciousness). This latter is both the *way* to break through the circular patterns that bind (for both San and the KFO), and the longed-for outcome of the intervention itself. This is not going to be easy. But paying attention to the *quality* of *how* the KFO brings what it brings, is key.

All of which brings us to the question of *practice*. It is the practice of the development intervention, and the maintaining of self-consciousness about that practice, that will determine the kinds of adjustments that need to be made in the structures of the development intervention. Starting the process of change by looking in the direction of structure is always tempting, because it implies that we may be able to improve a situation without changing ourselves. But the temptation is a form of self-seduction. If a social situation is to change, it is we who will have to change, including some of our deepest and (perhaps unconsciously) most cherished illusions.

A QUESTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Beneath the Surface

There is a story which we heard during our time in the Kalahari. The San, in their hunting days, were the greatest trackers the world has known. It seems that this was put to the test a few years ago. Some people set movie cameras up at a waterhole and then left, letting them run unattended for 24 hours, thus filming all the activity that took place in the vicinity of the waterhole. They then returned, bringing a group of San trackers with them. They asked the trackers to tell them, without seeing what had been filmed, what had taken place at the waterhole during that 24 hour period, merely on the basis of what had been left as tracks in the sand, as droppings and crushed twigs, as disturbed grasses ... whatever. The San scouted the area for awhile, and then returned

to tell their tale. Once their tale had been told, all watched the movie together. Remarkably, the tale of animal behaviour that the San told was in every respect precisely (as well as sequentially) the same as that which had actually taken place, as caught on film. Even more remarkably, the San noted that the cameras, being stationary, had failed to capture a kill that had taken place behind a sand dune, out of sight of the waterhole. They themselves had not yet been there, but from the tracks around the waterhole they assumed that such a kill had taken place. Everyone present then trooped off to the site of the presumed kill, and indeed found clear evidence of the San's claim, from the remains of the kill which still lay in place behind the dune!

The San were able, from the inanimate remains of animal activity, to see through to the activity itself. From the inanimate remains they were able to read the animate activity which had given rise to the remains. Using the remains as sign, as script, they were able to read the meaning of the script, to make sense of it. They were able to read the signs for their underlying patterns, which gave them an understanding of the situation *as it had been lived*.

We are called upon now to do the same thing. One of the reasons that we fall asleep to the underlying patterns of a social situation is because we focus on the visible outcomes of the situation rather than trying to penetrate through to the living activity which gave rise to those remains. We focus on the sign as the reality to be dealt with, rather than reading the signs for the meaning that they represent, that they are an outcome of. It is the invisible patterns underlying a situation that we must read if we are to make sense, and find a way through. We have to read for meaning, and meaning is always found in activity – which forms patterns when repeated – rather than in the inanimate remains of activity.

Another reason that we fall asleep to underlying patterns is because, when we awake to them, we realise that they are *our* patterns, and that change demands not simply changing things out there but changing *our very selves*. This is the very essence of personal responsibility. The development intervention with which we are here concerned seeks, among other things, to encourage personal responsibility on the part of the San; but the intervention works both ways. Each party will have to begin to change if the underlying dynamics of the situation are to shift. The real problem we are dealing with in the KFO is not about what must change out there but *how each person must change within themselves*. Everyone – San and KFO and all those who work within the ambit of this development intervention. There are patterns here which are stuck; changing them will unstick the situation, but each person will have to change.

The situation that the San and the KFO face is a seemingly impossible one. But it helps to ask the right questions; all development processes are assisted by asking the right questions. Here is a question: 'What future can we envisage for the San as a people, and what do we need to do to reach that future?' It seems like an obvious question, but we believe it to be unhelpful. We believe the following question to be far more relevant: '*How can the San behave so that they may gradually become capable of achieving a viable (though unpredictable and emergent) future which none of us can yet envisage, and how can the KFO behave so that it may best facilitate such behaviour amongst the San?*' In order to do this we have to look at current patterns and begin to find ways to shift these, amongst all concerned. It is a process of becoming more conscious of self.

An Insider/Outsider Consciousness

During our engagement with this development intervention, at this point in the ongoing conversation that was taking place between ourselves, the KFO and the San, we wrote the following piece, which we quote here in full.

“The idea is to help the San break through dependency, so that they may discover and create their own future. To do this, the principle of *embeddedness* forms an essential aspect of the development intervention; an accompaniment, a walking alongside, a working with and amongst and within. Yet in the process, the development intervention, the KFO, has met with its own issues of dependency, a circular pattern has emerged, and the San remain dependent. Many long hours of agonised thinking, many attempts at breaking through this cycle, have gone into the many years of engagement. Gains have been made, but more are needed. The situation is complex and difficult, not least because there is a certain inevitability about the circularity of the pattern; the more that is brought to relieve dependency, the more dependency is fostered.

It will not be easy to break through. No doubt, this is a long term intervention, because the issue it addresses is long term. The KFO (and its donors) must accept the long term nature of the engagement. Accepting this, there is a way to begin to make real shifts and gains. The principle of embeddedness is the only one that will work, but it will only work if an *insider/outsider* consciousness is built, on the part of the KFO. Else issues of co-dependency run riot. An *insider/outsider* consciousness is needed, by the KFO, to maintain its own alertness, its own rigour, and its own accountability. An *insider/outsider* consciousness is needed for an effective facilitation (community development) practice. An *insider/outsider* consciousness is needed for a holistic and responsive practice that is able to deal with an emergent and unpredictable future, that is able to help the San to discover and create its own place in that future.

An *insider/outsider* consciousness is precisely the place that the development intervention would like to encourage the San themselves to reach, because it is only this kind of awareness which will enable them to build an identity that will carry them into a future that is so very different from their past. San ownership of the KFO is perhaps best seen as a strategy; currently the KFO is both embedded and separate. There is that which the San bring to it, and there is that which outsiders bring to it, and each party has to meet the other. Each party has to strengthen itself for the other to be strengthened. The intervention has to straddle the polarity of ‘both/and’, rather than lapse into ‘either/or’.

Till now, the KFO has focused as much as possible on *what* must be done *out there* in the community. Focus on the KFO itself has seemed like an indulgence, when there is so much that needs to be done out there. This choice has appeared logical, honest and correct for a development intervention that is focused on helping the community rather than itself. But it has led to the current impasse. The fact is, the full implications of embeddedness have not been taken to their

logical conclusion. Embeddedness means precisely that the KFO and the community will share the same fate. They impact and inform and influence each other; if one changes, the other will too, and if neither changes, then everyone remains stuck. Both the KFO and the San are undertaking a development process. It is a fallacy to think that only the San are legitimate subjects/ objects of the development process. We have seen clearly that this is not so, and that either both the San and the development intervention will develop, or neither will. To the extent that the KFO is owned by the San, then breaking the cycle of KFO dependency is the best means of breaking San dependency (for the KFO is the San's greatest asset as they move into the future). To the extent that the KFO is not owned by the San, the building of an insider/ outsider consciousness is necessary for those intervening not to fall asleep into presumption but to be very clear about what they bring to the situation, in terms of how they bring it.

Whichever way we turn, the *way* the KFO behaves, the quality of its work, becomes the central key which may unlock the circularity of the pattern that binds. We do not believe that there is a choice here; there seems to be no alternative but to pay close attention to the KFO, to focus on *building the capacity of the KFO in as yet untried ways*. At the same time as increasing its effects in the field, this will build the capacities of the San who are involved with the KFO, and build a San asset with which it may move into the future.

This means moving beyond questions of structure and form only, and into questions of culture and practice. It is these latter which will inform – and even become – future strategy. Precisely how this is done must be the subject of intense deliberation amongst the leaders of the KFO. We do not wish to prescribe strategies concerning the renewal of the KFO here; we have wished only to illustrate the underlying dynamics in the story so that the general direction of the renewal of the KFO – and indeed the fact that such renewal forms the heart of the future – is illuminated. We are trying, really, to stimulate a process of thinking (that will go on for some time) rather than suggesting solutions or making recommendations.”

And indeed, the process continues to this day. This is not a story about final outcomes or solutions or answers or products. It is a story about the real nature of the processes that development interventions demand of us. And it is because this story illustrates so precisely the nature and demands of development processes that we share it now in the public domain. Due to the staying power, intelligent responsiveness and unbridled integrity of this development intervention with the first people of our planet, particularly at this moment when they and us are each at risk and when a developed consciousness is the only key that may bring us through, we felt that the story needed both telling and hearing.

For what lies at the heart of this story concerns every development intervention, every intervention into social process. This is true on a number of levels and for a number of aspects of this story, but none more than the following.

Development interventions occur at the crossroads of consciousness. We may imagine, even hope, that they are primarily about changes in material circumstances, but this is

never so. Development interventions – even where they deal with material circumstances – are about consciousness at the crossroads, or they are about nothing much at all, and are doomed to leave us simply repeating the same old cycles. And the crossroads of consciousness are met, to paraphrase Bernard Lievegoed in *Towards the 21st Century*, at “the boundaries of the shattered soul”. When the old ways no longer work, we often fight to maintain them with increasing vehemence, or we fall asleep into a denial of the impending and already impinging crisis. This is the response of a consciousness that has come to take itself for granted, that is unable to see itself from the outside, to see itself afresh, to appraise itself critically. Not even the demise of the world as we know it is as challenging, as painful, as waking up to our own unconscious collusion with things as they are, or have become. Any developmental shift will entail taking up the challenge to wake up, to see oneself from the outside as much as from the inside, to become self-conscious. To be able to live both inside and outside one's culture, one's traditions and habits and routines, at the same time. Anything less and the human being loses the freedom and responsibility of choice. And free and responsible choosing is the doom and grace of the human being.

All of us – those from indigenous and ancient cultures of wholeness and those from more fragmented modern cultures – are constrained by the same developmental imperative. It is the blessing of wholeness to enable us to belong and participate, but the shadow side of this is a falling asleep, an inability to see and respond in new ways when this becomes necessary (as it always does). The curse of a modern consciousness is its fragmentation and alienation, but its light is that, at best, it is able to be both inside and outside at the same time. We all have the same to learn – how to live at the crossroads of consciousness so that we may constantly appreciate what we have, and constantly renew and keep it fresh, at the same time. And in this lies the promise and the challenge of the uncompromised social development intervention.

A Final Note

Recently, quite some time after writing this piece, we came across an article by Steve Talbot entitled 'Love and Detachment'. Steve is a remarkable writer in the Goethean tradition, where it impinges on questions of technology and consciousness. His erudite and quite startling article, coming from a different angle, provides a remarkably complementary perspective to this story, and may help to broaden its meaning and value for the reader. You will find the article, as the last of a set of four articles entitled 'In the Belly of the Beast', at <http://natureinstitute.org/pub/persp/3/beast.pdf>. For those interested in taking any of these perspectives further, all four of his articles in this booklet have the power to startle into wakefulness.