

### 3. THE WORK OF KURU DEVELOPMENT TRUST

#### A CASE STUDY OF A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**Rein Dekker & Braam Le Roux (Botswana)**

**Rein Dekker** is the Project Co-ordinator of Kuru Development Trust, the largest grassroots development programme for the San people in the South African sub-continent. Kuru works in a substantial number of San communities in Western Botswana and runs programmes in such areas as adult education, dryland agriculture, ecotourism, pre-school education, art and craft, cultural programmes, income-generating activities, savings and micro-credit, women's groups and others. Community mobilisation, extension work, training and business support are Kuru's core activities. The Board of Trustees is elected from the village organizations in the communities where Kuru is active. Rein's research and professional interests as a development administrator are in balancing the needs of a large grassroots people's organisation with the professional demands of a support programme and also in providing support for the transition of a hunter-gatherer society to a cash-based economy through appropriate savings and credit facilities.

#### The San People

The San (or Basarwa or Bushmen) are one of the world's oldest indigenous populations with a history dating back over 20.000 years. They lived in small family bands as hunters and gatherers in the harsh environment of the Kalahari Desert. Traditionally decision making was by consensus and the society was egalitarian.

During the last two centuries pressure on land from farmers, mining companies and conservationists all but cut off the San people from their traditional lands. Visitors have turned into occupants. Although the majority of San remained on their ancestral land, they lost all rights to land and other natural resources as new occupants were more successful in obtaining legally recognised ownership, a concept unknown in San culture.

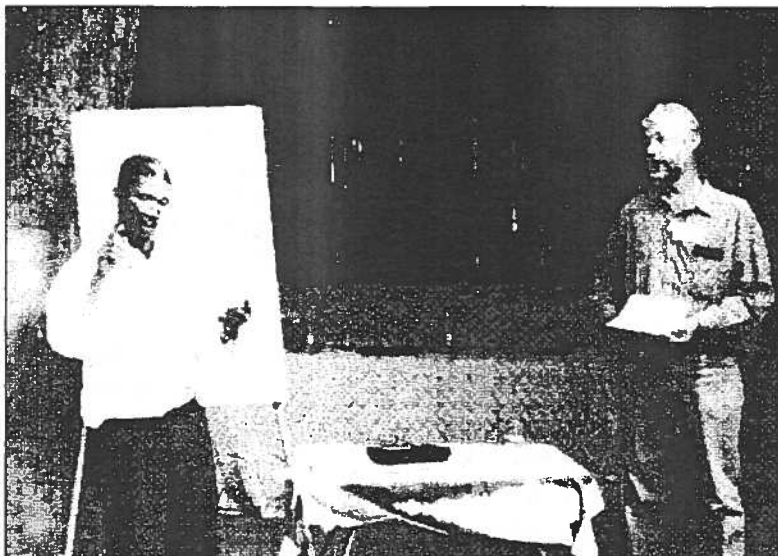
Today the San live in small groups scattered over different countries in Southern Africa. They can be found as

'squatters' near the cities, as labourers settled on the farms of big landowners or in government-designated settlements. Generally, those living in the rural areas have been forced into a sedentary lifestyle with all the excruciating social ills that result for a semi-nomadic hunter society that is not prepared for this change.

The San communities stand amongst the most marginalized and impoverished groups of Botswana society. The lack of group organisation, lack of educational services in their own languages and the lack of knowledge about their rights leaves them in an extremely vulnerable situation. Their political representation is limited.

In all Southern African countries San groups are in similar difficult situations. Small San groups in Zimbabwe have recently been moved out of their ancestral lands to make way for a wildlife management area. In Schmidtsdrift (South Africa) a group of 4000 San lives that had been recruited by the South African army during the struggle in Namibia. Now

that the 'Bushman Battalion' has become redundant, the San are forced to decide between remaining as permanent soldiers losing the privilege of staying with all their family in the army camps (that are dismantled and the ground returned to the owners) or resettling in Botswana, Namibia and Angola.



*Petrus Vaalbooi and Braam Leroux (2)*

During the past 15 years the Botswana government has created a number of settlements in the Kalahari Desert and provided a school and medical services to the communities. But life in these settlements is difficult for the San. The ecology of the environment is delicate and many San have begun raising cattle. Water and grass though are inadequate to sustain cattle farming on the limited land each settlement has available. Other economic opportunities outside the agrarian sector are scarce. As a result many San have become increasingly dependant upon private- and government-sponsored aid programmes.

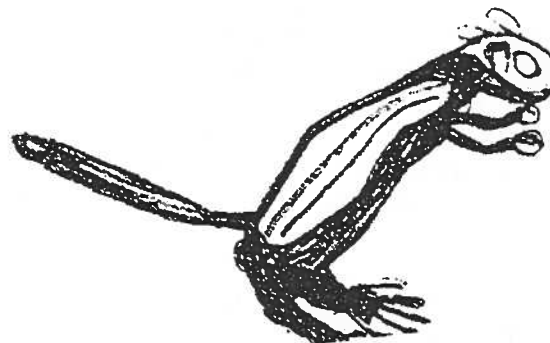
## History of the work of Kuru Development Trust

For over ten years, the Kuru Development Trust (Kuru) has grown into a sustained indigenous development organisation in the Ghanzi District of Botswana, committed to the development of the San or Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert. *Kuru* is a Naro word meaning "to do/create".

The primary objective of Kuru Development Trust is as follows:

"To assist marginalized communities in Botswana with the establishment and development of self-sustainable Community Self-Help Organisations, which will increase the capacity of these communities to gain control over their social and economic lives and which will be able to define, direct and implement the community's own development."

The Trust Board is led by a national board consisting of 15 representatives of the Village Organisations where Kuru is working, while the staff of approximately 70 also consists of a majority of native language speakers. Kuru has developed a wide range of activities in agriculture, income-generation, training, pre-school activities, art and culture. Focal points are training, extension organisational strengthening and support for economic activities.



## Programme philosophy

### (Three fundamental principles)

Kuru's principle for work in the communities is that we should not be working with committees, but with small interest groups and general meetings. Therefore we refer to Community Organisations [COs] to distinguish them from the existing Village Development Committees [VDCs]. The CO is meant to be a self-sustaining development institution at the village level that can enter into a partnership for development with governmental or private agencies. It is important that all parties, but especially the villagers, should see the CO as legitimate and credible. Credibility will depend on the fact of it continuing to convey benefits to the members. To have them legitimate and recognised, we will have to try and get the support of the Government for them and later also get some kind of legal registration so that they could enter into a contractual relationship with any donor or government.

In order to ensure that the CO is focused on a holistic development approach with the potential for self-reliance, THREE FUNDAMENTAL RULES have to be observed at all times:

i) the Community Organisation has to meet as a GENERAL body and on a regular basis, preferably weekly and at least once a month. Steps towards this can be the formation of smaller interest groups (eg. of craft producers or women) that can later work together. This requirement is necessary so that ALL members might review the needs and performance of their organisation regularly and be assured of transparency. This relates directly to the leadership crises that the San communities have and could pave the way for communities to start taking responsibility for their own developments. The responsibility for the comprehensive development of a village, in any case, cannot be undertaken

by individuals and committees, for all members must participate in the development process in their community in order to benefit from it. This is also an important mechanism to combat the embezzlement of funds and lessen the chances of jealousy problems;

ii) the second fundamental rule to be followed is that ALL members must make SAVINGS DEPOSITS at their regular meetings. The accumulation of this equity capital is of paramount importance to the viability of the CO. This equity is the anchor to which an entire savings-and-loans system can be tied. Savings generated by the individual members are the liability of the CO and are announced in public at each meeting. This is a non-cultural activity that is proving successful precisely for that reason. If we talk long-term sustainability then to own capital fund for development will teach people to work with money, it will make them proud of owning it and this will indeed make them less dependent;

iii) lastly, the members of the village must agree to IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS and let the community benefit collectively from their improved skills.

## Lessons so far

### Start small

Projects have to begin small or at a level not higher than that of the participants. However they cannot remain like that and as they grow the skills of people will have to grow with them. It is important that the individuals should contribute their skills to the community. Human as well as natural resources will have to be shared as much as possible. Later when the community has the means, they could pay for such services. This principle also acknowledges the importance of a procedural approach to

development. People have to go through stages in order to understand and control the process of development.

### Grassroots planning

Even to this very day most of the planning concerning the remote areas is being done in the cities. For the purpose of creating a capacity for self-sustained development at the village level, planning from the urban centres must give way to planning from the villages. The villagers must be the effective planners and the planning process must draw upon the knowledge and experience of the villagers. As we now discover the importance of quality of life versus cash income, there should always be a discussion about values that are important to the communities and what they want to achieve with development. These and other methods all have the same goal, namely to give control and a sense of ownership to the communities over the development processes they find themselves in.

### The incentive to organize

How do we find a single activity that will bring the village residents into a group action? It has been said that group action will only be maintained as long as the group's welfare is improved. The problem is to find an activity that commands broad-based acceptance in a village. We have to accept that, left to themselves, the villagers are capable of identifying a need, fulfilment of which would bring the village or interest group together and serve as the glue to bind them in a continuing relationship. Usually this kind of activity will be based around an income-generating project. With the San communities, the easiest starting point would most often be to stimulate the production and sales of traditional crafts.

### Entry point

Most projects fail because they cannot find an appropriate entry point for community participation. Clearly, programmes that sponsor extension education like pre-schools in areas where lack of irrigation or land are the foremost problems, cannot be expected to attract broad-based and continuing support from the villagers. The basic idea to have an entry point around which things will start, is part of the conceptual package of the programme. The detail of what it is going to be, will differ from place to place. Kuru may give a one time grant directly to a CO in a number of instalments. It has to be given directly to the CO in order to stop the situation where other people are in control of the village funds. Another feature of the grant is payment of wages to villagers. Experience indicates that the initial infrastructure for a project could require hundreds of man days to complete and to expect subsistence holders to continue their labour free day in and out is really asking for too much. The salaries paid to the members should mostly be equal and it will further give them the possibility to start their savings programme.

### "Feeding"

A very important and challenging task facing development facilitators working with COs is to keep them interested by 'feeding' them with activities that are profitable and that enhance the ability of rural groups to manage their resources collectively and productively. The CO should be capable of meeting the development needs of their members on a continuing basis; they must become the all-purpose service organisations for the small farmers or small producers. Their credibility as village-level development institutions will be measured against their performance in 'delivering the goods' to their members. In the rural areas one of the main obstacles is that certain services to communities are usually very limited. It is not good enough

for people to obtain better skills in tanning, for example, if there is no shop that will keep the raw materials in stock or if there is no plan in place to do the marketing of products. In this context it is clear that another kind of administrative and supplies infrastructure and extension network is needed that reaches all the way to where the villages are. This type of infrastructure helps increase the productivity of the material and the human resources of a village. Subsequently these channels of input delivery can be used for other inputs and then supplemented with marketing channels for output.

### **KURU's Current Programme Details**

To meet the demands that were described previously, the Kuru Programme has grown to include the following areas and projects:

#### Extension and Networking

The Extension Department is responsible for general outreach activities, for contacts with member organisations and new minority groups and for the networking on a regional level.

As a first point of entry into the local groups, the Extension Department will seek and fund an essential income-generating project or infrastructure that makes production possible .

Part of the outreach work with each community, in fact a requirement for participation, is the facilitation of the establishment of rural development capital through a savings and credit system. In addition, the Extension Department is also responsible for establishing a network between development initiatives of marginalized minority groups in Southern Africa.

#### Education and Cultural Work

The general function of the Education and Training Department is to provide meaningful support to Kuru's existing programmes as well as to the extension and other development activities in the form of research and training on various levels. Actual contents will be prescribed by the needs and priorities of the respective programmes and their different stages of development. The ultimate goal of the training will be self-sustainability and localisation of the programme. Specific objectives are programmes for skills training and capacity building of Kuru staff and cultural programmes geared towards creating the pre-conditions for self-sustainability of the communities by furthering cultural awareness, building self-esteem and generating better understanding of the dynamics of acculturation.

#### Business Department

The objective of the Kuru Business Department is to provide support to viable economic activities in the various communities, as this is seen to be the only long-term solution to counter dependency, encourage self-sustainability, foster a sense of pride and achievement and overcome marginalization. In view of the distances, the lack of communication facilities in the settlements and the physical and cultural lack of access to markets, intermediate wholesale and marketing services will be required. These services will procure and stock the raw materials and other inputs required for production, provide quality control for the products, research markets both in Botswana and abroad, maintain contacts with suppliers and customers and actually market the products.

## Conclusion

When it changed CO into a regional Support Organisation, Kuru adopted all these 'aspects of a development strategy' and called it: "COMMUNITY OWNED DEVELOPMENT". Up until now we have had mixed success with its implementation. After one year the main difficulty has been to persuade all the existing projects to accept the new strategy. This has not been easy because the communities have been used to the fact that "other" people will look for more funds, that the ever-present project advisors from outside should find solutions, that if their lives did not improve it meant that Kuru and other development agents were not doing their work.... Now the responsibility is shifting to the communities and real sustainability is for the first time within reach.

We were very concerned whether the savings project would capture the imagination of the participants that had no

history or culture of such an activity. Now we are able to say that eight communities saved in their first year a combined amount of P60,000 (US\$ 15000). The first loans have been given to communities for development activities that they had chosen, based on their savings and we are anxiously waiting to see how they will pay it back. The implementation of the programme in new areas looks much more promising. The different aspects of taking the communities to sustainable development are in place. What really remains to be seen is whether Kuru will be able to develop viable projects with and for the communities and whether a people-owned development support organisation will, in the long run, be able to resist the pressures from the participants to give in to a handout strategy. In a dry, harsh environment such as the Kalahari, isolated and unpredictable, this is not easy. Wish us luck!

