

## 8. SOUTH AFRICAN SAN INSTITUTE (SASI)

### A SERVICE AND SUPPORT ORGANISATION TO THE SAN OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

**Geoff Perrott (South Africa)** was born, and grew up, in Cape Town. He studied Marketing and Sales at the Cape Technikon and then worked and travelled overseas and through Africa for almost three years. On returning from his trip through Africa he was approached to set up an organisation to aid and empower the San. He visited many of the areas in southern Africa where the San are living and wrote a comprehensive report for the SASI Trustees about his experiences and findings during this trip. He began working for SASI as a co-ordinator in 1996. His first tasks were to set up the office and to raise funds to cover the core costs and to develop and introduce programmes like the legal programme. Now, almost two and a half years later, SASI is an organisation that has established itself as an efficient service and support organisation to the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) and other San-based organisations in the region.

#### General Overview

SASI is a service and support organisation dedicated to serving the needs of the San in Southern Africa. It was established in July 1996 in response to a need for support expressed by the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), a San-based networking organisation operating in Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

WIMSA's primary aim is the development and empowerment of the historically disadvantaged and persecuted San peoples and strives to address radically the San's inferior access to political, social and economic rights. One of WIMSA's key objectives is to secure unity amongst the previously divided San communities in all the Southern African countries, so that their struggle for political and social rights is more effective. SASI's vision is to ensure justice and dignity of the San through land rights, access to

natural resources, lobbying and advocacy, tourism development initiatives, language and cultural support.

SASI supports WIMSA in their aims, objectives and vision and has initiated a number of projects and programmes in line with WIMSA's aims.

#### The SASI programmes

The following are examples of some of SASI's current programmes:

##### Legal Rights

The San suffer from a lack of human rights in every way, not having ever had the means to secure effective representation in criminal and civil matters. SASI provides legal assistance to San communities, particularly where their contractual rights are at stake. Matters in which legal assistance is provided are in contracts with landowners and

companies, film producers, art wholesalers and tourism operators, who have in the past tended to exploit the innocence and lack of legal knowledge of the San.

#### Land claims

The right to land is correctly acknowledged to be at the heart of the struggle of indigenous peoples for dignity, identity and appropriate development. The San, known as the 'First Peoples' on the African sub-continent, have over centuries been hunted, persecuted and driven off their traditional lands by more assertive tribes and pioneer farmers, to the point where they now generally live in landless poverty. SASI has launched a number of initiatives aimed at claiming back and securing title over traditional lands, of which the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (KGNP) in South Africa and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) in Botswana are the two most important examples.

#### Cultural Support

SASI is also involved in a Cultural Resource Audit with the San in the southern Kalahari. The work includes gathering information for cultural land-use mapping, constructing family trees and recording as many of the original names in the San language used in that area. All this information will be used to strengthen the people's understanding of themselves and others of them; it will be used in the school curriculum and used as evidence in the Land Claim case should it go to court. This community will also be the test case for this kind of work in southern Africa so, if successful, other San communities will have the option of doing the same.

#### San Cultural Village and Training Centre

Tourism is invading San lives and privacy. Many of the communities do not yet have the capacity or know how to deal with the massive influx of tourists in the southern African region. The idea behind a project to counter this problem is to establish a San Cultural Village and Training Centre in Cape Town which will be the 'headquarters' for controlling San tourism within the region. The idea is that the San will be trained in the skills of managing a tourism operation so that they can take this information back to their communities and establish small income-generating projects at their villages throughout southern Africa. The profits from the San Cultural Village and Training Centre in Cape Town will go towards the establishment of these other income-generating projects in the region. The Centre will act as:

- an **educational centre** for the San with a craft shop for the tourists,
- a **training centre** for San tourism initiatives in other areas,
- an **income-generating project** for WIMSA, and thus the San communities in Southern Africa; and as
- an **information centre** on San culture and history.

#### Angolan Land: The Landmine Issue

WIMSA and SASI are looking into the possibility of regaining land in Angola for the Angolan San, 4200 of whom were brought back to South Africa by the South African Army after the "war" in Angola. Land mines play a major role in keeping the San from utilising their ancestral lands and the mines need to be removed and the land reclaimed. This would be done by using information gathered from the

Angolan San, mapping out their ancestral lands and then demining the area, giving the San the opportunity to return.

Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC)

IPACC aims to lobby for the rights of the indigenous peoples of Africa at the highest level and to co-ordinate activities of all of Africa's indigenous peoples. Board members were elected in Geneva 1997 and they had their first official meeting in Cape Town in November 1997. IPACC has recently begun to contact Africa's indigenous populations and inform them of the forum that has been created. IPACC will also assist these people in participating in world forums such as the Working Group of Indigenous Populations, which is held in Geneva annually.

Youth Programme at Schmidtsdrift

There are two communities living at Schmidtsdrift, near Kimberley, in South Africa. They have just bought a farm in the area and will be moving onto this in the near future.

There are a few projects in place for their move but very little that deals with the youth. The idea is to create a programme that the youth will organise and in which they will take part as part of their plans during and after the move. The details of the programme are still to be worked out with the communities at Schmidtsdrift.

Resource Library

SASI has started to set up a resource library on the San. Information is currently being collected from the other various San projects. The library will contain books, papers, videos, CDs and photographic material.



**"This conference has brought the San people together to share each others problems and find possible solutions."**

**(Rennie Mishe, South Africa)**

