

## 2. CLOSING REMARKS TO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' CONSULTATION ON EMPOWERMENT, CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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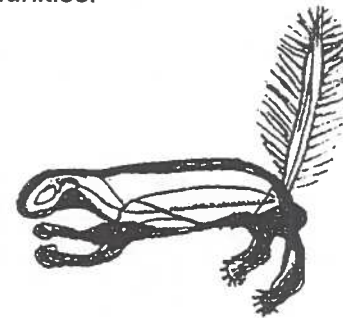
The organisers of a conference such as The Indigenous Peoples' Consultation on Empowerment, Culture and Spirituality in Community Development are naturally faced with the question of whether the outcome of the gathering was worth the efforts and costs of involving participants from five continents, namely North and South America, Europe, Australia and Africa.

Development workers like ourselves, who have been assisting the San of southern Africa in their endeavours for more than a decade, are now well acquainted with stereotypical claims to the effect that the money spent on international workshops would be put to better use in implementing development programmes, or that San communities are not served by some of their members discussing development constraints in an unfamiliar environment, or that no effective learning experience can emanate from a meeting of indigenous people from different continents and diverse cultural backgrounds. To address such claims seriously, it seems essential to refer to a part of the history that led to the request for this particular conference to be held.

The first Regional San Conference organised by Namibia's Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, was held in Windhoek in 1992. The second Regional San Conference was hosted by Botswana's Ministry of Local Government and Lands in Gaborone in 1993. As a result of

these two conferences the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) was established in 1996 as a regional networking organisation for the San. Suffice it to say that the San have taken every opportunity to utilise this platform productively, and it was on the strength of their resolve that WIMSA and the Kuru Development Trust sought to fulfil their request for this conference.

The San regard The Indigenous Peoples' Consultation as a natural progression, in that it shifts their developmental efforts from a regional to an international level. Over the past few years the various San groups of southern Africa have been attempting to unite towards a common goal. Through their endeavours, they have gained an awareness of the importance of sharing experiences with indigenous people worldwide who have already attained the goals that they plan to attain. Learning from others is seen by the San to be a potent tool for accelerating the development process for their communities.





*Elfirede Gaeses and Nicolaas Tenda (1)*

The Indigenous Peoples' Consultation has resulted in the formulation of 13 principles on which an indigenous peoples' development procedure should ideally be based. In adopting these principles the San participants felt unable to predict whether their communities would need to experience a similar process of achievement and setback as have their indigenous counterparts in Africa, North and South America, Australia and Europe, or whether this exchange of views and experiences would assist them to overcome the many constraints they face more easily. From an observer's point of view, however, it is hard to imagine that the San's exposure to their more enlightened counterparts, along with a set of verifiably effective development principles, will not assist them in some way. It is, therefore, also hard to imagine that any claims in opposition to such a conference would hold any weight.

I would like to thank everyone who helped to make this conference possible and who, furthermore made it a success. I am convinced that every participant gave her or his best input and I will therefore avoid conveying special thanks to individuals.

It is my sincere hope that a follow-up workshop will be conducted in due course wherein the application of the 13 resolutions of The Indigenous Peoples' Consultation will be thoroughly discussed.

Thank you all and congratulations for a job well done!

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