ORGANISATION
IN DEVELOPMENT:

points
of view

CDRA

A CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE

Contents

Chairperson's introduction

Last year, 2007, was significant for the organisation as it marked the CDRA's 20th anniversary. The year provided the organisation with the space and opportunity to look back, pause, reflect and celebrate. As part of the 20th anniversary celebrations the organisation did not produce an annual report in the form to which you have become accustomed. In its place we produced a book – *"Dreaming Reality: the future in retrospect"*, a compilation that looks at social intervention through the lens of the reports from 1990 to 2003.

Last year was also evaluation time at the CDRA. The process we embarked on provided us with the space and opportunity to take stock, reflect and connect to our unfolding story of development. The process was conceptualised as a self-evaluation, its design and flow allowed the organisation to first look inward, connecting with self, with purpose and intention. This was complemented by work, undertaken by an external facilitator, through which we sought feedback on our key programmes from peers, colleagues, client organisations and donors. Both the internal and external work has resulted in an emerging view of the context. In July 2008 we will enter into a strategic process using this view to shape our responses to our challenges.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this year's Annual Report which comes at a time when the CDRA, through its evaluation process, has reflected deeply on the demands that the complex, ever-changing context make on organisations. In the next pages we explore various facets of organisation in development. We look at the challenges that organisations, as part of broader systems, face in remaining relevant and connected to their developmental purpose while being constrained by bureaucratic requirements; and we look at alternative innovative practices and impulses from the periphery which offer new possibilities and hope for civil society. As the context has become increasingly complex and is ever-changing, it is becoming increasingly important for organisations to build resilience in the face of profound challenges.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Board and staff of the CDRA for another year of extraordinary achievement. The evaluation process made it particularly demanding for staff. However, once again, your commitment and hard work carried the organisation through. I would also like to thank our donor partners as well as the many individuals and organisations who make use of our services and make it possible for the CDRA to do this work. We remain immensely grateful to you all!

Di Oliver
Chairperson: CDRA Board of Directors

This year's Annual Report offers a faceted reflection on the state of organisation in development. In looking at this theme, we pursue two angles on 'organisation.' We are interested in organisations – as things, entities, structures. What is their condition, their status and their health? In asking this question, we find differing, sometimes contradictory answers. Organisations are in crisis. Organisations are blossoming like never before. Much depends on how you look at things.

This Annual Report also offers another perspective – a larger interest in and concern with the activity of 'organisation' within development. What is happening there? To what extent are we managing to organise ourselves – from the grass-roots through to major national and multi-lateral agencies – in ways that offer appropriate and adequate responses to our times? Where and how is organisation-as-activity happening? Where is it not happening? And why?

The following pages offer various points of view on the state of organisation in development. In assembling these we have drawn on a diversity of sources. We have looked within – into our own organisational experience and reflection on practice; and we have looked out and around us – into the world and that of our immediate circle of clients and colleagues. We have drawn on several organisational voices, perspectives and emphases. In this Annual Report, you will find not one position, but a range of points of view. Taken all together, they offer both critique and alternative; hope and despair; perspective from theory and perspective from practice, observation of self and observation of other. A faceted view of the state of organisation in development.

Finding our way

JAMES TAYLOR

"South Africa has no model to guide its transformation from the apartheid past to its envisaged future. It has to find its own way."
Mamphela Ramphele

The work of the CDRA lies in an interaction between two concepts: organisation and development. Our focus is the development of organisations working in the development sector. Beyond this we focus on identifying and promoting practices that make these organisations more effective in their developmental purpose. I will try in this article to create a picture of organisation in the development context but before doing so, must first locate the idea of organisation in the greater developmental context – or crisis – of the cosmos.

The enormity of the social and environmental challenges that face human society are in keeping with human development. Advances in the way society organises itself and applies its knowledge through technology have vastly increased the range of ways people can engage and impact their world. The relationships of extraction, dominance, competition and consumption that are so influential in shaping human society and organisation lie at the heart of the looming crisis.

There is growing urgency in the world to reverse the tendency of human organisation to draw and concentrate resources and power from the periphery to the centre in ways that deplete and diminish. This urgency is fuelled by the growing realisation that both ecological and human systems are becoming unstable and unsustainable.

To explore further the state of organisation in development I share a few stories that are immediate and current to my experience and concern. The first two are from the periphery.

This year I have worked with a most remarkable organisation. The Ethiopian National Association for People Affected by Leprosy is an association of over 15 000 paying members, the vast majority of whose members are still forced to beg for a living. The experiences of these people represent perhaps one of the most extreme forms of society's tendency to exclude and marginalise people. Their experience has been shared in many countries over many centuries. The role and importance of organisation in the lives of these people becomes clear through the words of two of the founder members:

"We were desperate and felt we were left out. Something inside of us just burst out and made us do things. We started empty handed not knowing who would help. But we did not care."

"We want our freedom, we don't want to go back. It is not about material things – we have tasted freedom. We have now got recognition and are being invited into meetings even with government. We have the voice, we are being heard, we want to keep this and continue to fight."

Self-help Manenberg, another organisation I have worked with this year, operates in one of the toughest suburbs of my own city, Cape Town. It also represents a remarkable story. Its origins lie in an attempt to make psychological counselling and social services relevant to the lives and struggles of people living in Manenberg in the '90s. Started by outsiders, it was based on a conviction that all people have needs and also have contributions to make. They tried to move beyond the view of Manenberg as a place only of problems and needs, to a place of ability, human resources and community strength. This was made practical in the principle that those needing counselling had the ability to provide high quality counselling. What is now Self-help Manenberg has grown out of the belief that those engaged in the process of taking more control of their own lives could help others to do the same. I worked with the organisation as the founders'

convictions were fully realised as the last of all of the positions (that of director) was filled by a local resident and longstanding member of the organisation.

In both of these stories organisations have provided the means for individuals pushed to the periphery, to come together in relationship with each other in ways that have changed their lives. Organisation has been a powerful vehicle to give expression to the potential that individuals have and to further build their skills and their confidence. Through organisation individuals have managed to mobilise their collective influence to access resources and exert influence previously unimagined. All of this they have used to provide their own communities with much needed services.

One of these organisations was started from within the community while the other was initiated by an outsider. But both of them have been assisted through the first decade of their development by sympathetic and good funders who have walked much of the rocky road with them. They have managed to build close and understanding relationships despite the fact that they operate from very different worlds. These examples highlight the importance of organisation in development. They also hint at the beginnings of the webs of relationships between individuals and organisations required to form the larger systems that include and maximise rather than exclude and diminish.

But the relationships in these webs, between those who have access to and control over the resources and those who need them to achieve their full potential, are fraught. There are enormously powerful forces that divert the focus of attention away from the needs and priorities of the less powerful to those of the more powerful party. After mobilising their own internal resources successfully the greatest risk to these organisations now lies in the relationships through which they must access resources concentrated at the centre.

Over the last couple of years I have also worked with some of the funding organisations operating from countries far removed from their ultimate recipients. These organisations are going through a period of great change and challenge. It is becoming increasingly difficult for funders to accompany their recipient organisations through their lengthy and often tortuous journeys of development towards independence and the ultimate prospect of inter-dependence.

The roots of these international NGOs lie in civil society in their own countries. Some started out supported by members and constituents driven by feelings of solidarity with people in need in far flung parts of the world. Others were driven by their members' concerns and campaigns around injustice and inequality. The constituency-based nature of these organisations gave them voice in their own countries. The solidarity relationships these organisations initiated between ordinary citizens of different countries contributed enormously to the struggles of those at the margins, and to the role of civil society globally.

But much is changing. Many of the larger and older of these international NGOs are diverting their attention away from their constituencies. In pursuit of the ever increasing funding required, they have been drawn into relationships with their governments and with business. Relationships with their back-donors are having a much greater influence on shaping these organisations than the fading voices of their constituents. The needs and requirements of their ultimate beneficiaries have little chance of shaping priorities and practices.

As competition for funds has increased, organisations have readily adopted new business practices. They have branded themselves, gone global, and used simplistic

marketing images and solutions to compete for new funding markets. As they increasingly compete for official government aid they have had to adopt demanding bureaucratic accountability procedures. They have also had to go to great lengths to try and convincingly measure impact and prove what value they have added. Many are struggling to do this and starting to question whether they will be able to in the long run.

These international NGOs are further shaped by having to respond to policies, plans and conventions centrally generated by their governments and implemented through the allocation of development funds. Their governments in turn are responding to the even more centralised Millennium Development Goals and the Paris Declaration. These traditional International NGOs are having to get slicker, more business-like and professionalise. They are being forced to review and develop their practices and report on their results. There is a growing sense of being held much more accountable by those who control the funding resources.

When looking at this more international level it is clear that development goals and priorities are taking centre stage more than ever before in history. National and global governance institutions are starting to set goals and develop plans in response to the growing inequalities in the world and impact of unsustainable economic growth and consumption. In the process, and as the urgency grows, they are drawing power to the centre to muster the authority to implement the best solutions available. The unintended result is that the ultimate recipients of development funding are increasingly being burdened with and shaped by the bureaucratic and strategic priorities of those in control of the resources.

From the international I move to the national, to South Africa. Here many of the elements of the preceding stories of organisation and development come together. We have the now iconic story of the people's struggle. After decades of struggle against all odds and at great cost the oppressed and ostensibly powerless people 'won' against the most considered, conscious and systematic forces of exclusion. Through a combination of generosity and necessity, after the

unlikely victory the victors used the power of their newly gained positions as rulers to include the 'losers'. We have experience of what can be achieved when ordinary people achieve extra-ordinary feats. They organised themselves, linking a myriad actions to each other through broad common purpose and shared values over many decades. We also experienced a brief moment of imagining that there might be a way of bringing the centre and periphery together in a new way of organising that benefited the whole and all of the parts within it much more equally.

In 1994 the stage was set for South Africa to become a crucible that brought together the best that the world had to offer in new ways of organising a society. Fourteen years have now passed. Our country has achieved much. But we have not yet managed to find ways of converting our guiding values into organisational practices that are truly effective in delivering on the vision.

Our harsh reality is that despite enormous success in turning around a desperately failing economy, the gap between the rich and the poor has grown to the point where it is now the greatest in the world. Along with this we are losing ground in growing the sense of solidarity, co-responsibility and the participation of everyone in continuing the struggle towards achieving the ideals of the 'new' South Africa.

The dream was that we would build new forms of organisation based on the values, principles and aspirations of those who sacrificed so much. The moment came and as an enthusiastic new democracy we were invited to join the world community. To gain entry we took the package, quickly convinced that 'there is no alternative'. Now we experience the story much as everyone else. Our plans and our policies are in place. Their implementation requires capacity we are constantly told we do not have. It is difficult to hold the planners accountable for the inappropriateness of their plans. As the urgency of the needs of those at the periphery turns to despair and anger, power gets concentrated at the centre in the vain hope that it will help to manage and control the implementation.

The full horror of our situation is playing itself out right now. Those so desperate to share in the abundant wealth of our country are turning on each other in

horrific xenophobic attacks and killings. The first response of the President is to call in the army to join forces with the police.

It is abundantly clear that the dominant organisational forms that shape our society are incapable of addressing the crises of our time. Crises are critical moments of opportunity for transformation. There are two essential responses to the looming crises. From the centre we see a clear re-dedication to improving and entrenching centralisation of problem-solving, planning and control. From the margins there is an abundant blossoming of creative alternative thinking and the budding of new practices.

Exciting things are happening. Natural living systems and organisms are becoming the models for learning about organisation. New organisational principles and assumptions are emerging. It is becoming clear that there must be organisational alternatives and possibilities and that diversity is an enormous asset. New actors are coming into the development sector; new social entrepreneurs and philanthropists, many of whom have benefitted and learned from sharing in the concentration of wealth and power, are looking for new meaning and challenge. New social movements of those excluded, linked with those who care, are mobilising.

The elusive challenge of organisation in development is to find new forms that connect parts of systems together in ways that benefit the whole by enriching all of its parts. The CDRA, as a centre for developmental practice, is focusing its energy on researching viable alternative organisational forms and practices. We focus on bringing the experience of civil society, particularly from its periphery, as a more forceful voice in the world.

"Using known approaches to transitions to democracy and promotion of sustainable development is likely to limit our horizons. We need to take the risk of venturing into the unknown to explore new possibilities."
Mamphela Ramphele [1]

---

1 Mamphela Ramphele (2008) "Laying Ghosts to Rest: Dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa". Tafelberg Publishers, Cape Town.

Management's imperfect realities

SUE SOAL

"Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in"
Leonard Cohen

Each year, CDRA practitioners work with many diverse organisations on various aspects of their organisational life.[2] Over the years, we have come to see that both internal and external change are permanent features of organisational life, a truism that has acute bearing for organisations that are themselves concerned with effecting social change. As the results of our efforts take shape, so new realities – internally and in the world – emerge. And sometimes, often, these are quite different from what was imagined, intended, planned, or even committed to as a 'deliverable.'

Alongside many others in our world, our perspective on the place of planning has shifted and a more nuanced view of causality has emerged. No longer can we (CDRA and those that we serve) plan in isolation from continual awareness and reading of our environments, nor can planning happen as a once-off event. Increasingly, we see planning, and its associated activities: imagining, intending, thinking, learning, re-thinking, strategising, and continuous reconnecting with the intentions of any programme – as a continuous activity … a kind of conceptual and strategic 'awakeness' that is a core competence of both individuals and whole organisations.

Out of this more dynamic view of organisational life and the realities that it works within, we have come to see CDRA's service as a form of 'accompaniment.' We
use our specialised focus and skill in organisational process to accompany our clients and colleagues in their continuing efforts to make sense of and respond appropriately to their environments. There is no simple 'deliverable' in this kind of work – although there are points along the way that may be usefully marked by collaboration with external service providers such as us. The quality of this relationship is increasingly experienced as a collegial endeavour towards improved organisational capacity to engage sensibly with the times.*

However, and as we have shifted in how we see ourselves and our relationships, so we have encountered new difficulties and areas of stuck-ness – within ourselves, within our context and within the organisations that we seek to serve. Practices and habits that seem to fly in the face of the very realities that we are facing. These are not simple mistakes that we are making. We live in a world that externalises, that demands simplicity and results, that rewards fulfilment of objectives (regardless of their suitability). The pace and volume of work increases boundlessly, and individually we all try to make sense of it while keeping up. It is little wonder that we maintain these habits, despite their contributing to the difficulties that we face. Taken together, they seem to represent an entrenched longing for some of the pressure to simply go away … for it to become someone else's problem.

---

2 CDRA's field practice has its origins in the discipline of organisation development (OD) – an approach to system-wide, planned organisational change that emphasises insight (into self as individual, organisational patterns and development), participation and strategic thinking. Over the year under review we provided a wide range of services to 55 organisations.

These practices and habits include –

Management by objectives – a relic from the old, mechanical ways of seeing organisation and maintained through continued dominance of the 'log-frame,' and its accompanying project orientation, as the primary planning and accountability method within the funded sector. While most thoughtful people in the sector are aware that this orientation is at odds both with the times and also with the realities of working with human and social change, we seem unable to translate this awareness into viable alternatives.

Instead, implicit in our assessment of individuals and whole organisations, is the measure of their ability to complete a log-frame, and then to implement projects, rather than in an assessment of their ability to engage – purposefully – with a constantly emerging present. Attachment to this orientation results in the absurdity of many people expending a great deal of energy in managing the system's requirements, in order that the 'real' work might continue untroubled. At best, things get by. At worst, a lie is actively created. Always, it drains the energy of the system, reducing what can be achieved.

Partnerships as things, not relationships – as new ideas move into our organisational and institutional thinking, so we create new emphases and values. One of these is the current thinking around partnerships. Recognition of the need for organisational interdependence, collaborative work and mutual learning has resulted in a plethora of new inter-organisational arrangements, agreements and memoranda of understanding.

However, and despite the advances in our concepts, we fail to translate this understanding into changed practices and new ways of being, working and engaging together. Instead of being an approach to living relationship, 'partnership' has become the new (fixed) structure. We create (or find ourselves participating in) partnerships as 'things' that are then tasked with delivery (of the aforementioned objective). Sometimes we find ourselves trapped in partnership. Rather than being expressions of peer-based collaboration, freely entered into, they mutate into contracts that extract, with little reciprocity or learning. The processes and relationships required to maintain partnership as a vital embodiment of inter-organisational intention that is continuously renewed, learnt from – the results of which penetrate each organisational reality and the partnership as a whole – are sadly lacking.

The **pervasiveness of outsourcing** – What may have begun life as a pragmatic strategy for by-passing bureaucratic lassitude, enforcing accountability, and ensuring cost-efficiency has become a pervasive cultural phenomenon in organisational life. And organisations concerned with development are key participants in this phenomenon. While this practice may, at times, achieve greater focus, accountability and cost-effectiveness, its unintended consequence has been to turn management attention towards making key elements of organisational life someone else's problem. Yet in development practice, a central purpose is to create the organisational and social conditions whereby responsibility for one's actions and circumstances is accepted and exercised.

Consequences of the outsourcing habit include a shift away from managing people and processes, to managing consultants; greater fragmentation of organisational and strategic life as central programme elements are packaged for outsourcing and subsequent dissolution of the 'in-between' spaces in organisational and social life. This phenomenon is illustrated most starkly in the tendency of organisations to imagine their very processes – the living source of vitality and renewal between human beings – as something that can be phrased as a 'deliverable' and handed to external consultants for execution and resolution.

Evaluation as bureaucratic requirement – the funded sector lives with evaluation as a necessary, and potentially valuable, feature of its organisational reality. A combination of accountability requirements and own need to see and express the often intangible and elusive effects of our efforts has resulted in huge interest in evaluation – its premises, methods and place in organisational life. Accompanying this interest, have been tighter and more explicit contracts regarding what must be measured and shown in evaluations, and an industry of evaluation consultants.

As with organisational process, evaluation – something that should be intrinsic to the management processes and organisational life of those wishing to make a difference socially – has become a 'deliverable' for outsourcing. For the overburdened managers of organisations, it is yet another bureaucratic requirement that must be fulfilled. In so doing, evaluation's potential to prompt organisational learning, reflection and real ownership of practice and its impacts has been lost. Instead of building organisational strength, evaluation has become a mechanism by which thinking and learning is extracted from organisations, depleting them further.

Commodification of skills – all too often, attempts to translate organisational intention into practice comes as a preoccupation with the level, quality and focus of each individual's skills. Rather than see them as developing over time, in the context of particular organisational life and relationships, people are 'sent' on training courses to 'get' the skills they are assessed as needing. This has contributed to the boom in (rather costly) training service providers of uneven quality and also to increased mobility of people who leave their jobs in frustration when, on returning from training, they find a static organisational culture, and are unable to contribute what they have learnt. While skills may be growing, and certainly training continues, organisational ability to integrate and make good use of the outcomes of training lags far behind. So too does organisational ability to develop necessary skills in-house – be it through mentoring, collective reflective learning or field-based on the job training.

The fetish of the tools – not only have we become preoccupied with the training of individuals, but we also have a very particular view of what constitutes a worthwhile skill. Despite the complexity of the social situations we work with, despite the sweeping scope of our intervention programmes and the holistic human capacities that they imply, despite the individual requirements that these place on practitioners, we remain enthralled by the belief that the correct combination of 'tools' will deliver on these ambitions. To be sure, individuals do need practical ability, and good training is one way of getting it. Such skill builds confidence and improved field effectiveness. But it is the relative de-valuing of other, higher order skills, that is so perturbing. While a preoccupation with management by objectives may suggest to us that all people need is the right 'tool' to implement a given plan, the reality is that the situations we work with require far greater analytical ability, judgement and reflective qualities than can ever be found rummaging through the metaphorical 'toolbox'.

Big thinking by workshop – while not confined to those working in development and social change, this feature of organisational life is probably most prominent in our world. The workshop is ubiquitous. Like outsourcing, what began life as expression of a particular intention and commitment (including a desire, sometimes a requirement, for inclusion, representivity

and diversity in the composition of decision making fora and a tradition and method for working collectively in groups) has now become a habit. The default, fall-back mode by which all sorts of big thinking and decision making is conducted. Workshops are convened for governance, strategy and learning. They are the major vehicle by which partnerships run themselves. They are the format for networking and peer learning. Information is shared via workshop (despite the singular inefficiency of this method for this purpose). Where evaluations do interface with the organisations that they evaluate, it is generally via the workshop method.

Instead of meaningful and inspirational moments of working together, what we have is a plethora of formulaic workshops that consume people's time, leaving them frustrated and cynical. 'Proper' work – striking deals, networking, referring, exchanging ideas and lessons – is all done in the breaks (and sometimes in sessions too as captive participants write their reports and complete correspondence, looking up occasionally to make their 'input'). Yet the despair engendered by use of this blunt instrument seldom surfaces, and few alternatives are tried. We stick with the known, making our way around it, rather than transform what is not working. This may be because of lethargy, but may also be because, in being lulled to sleep (sometimes quite literally) through our workshops, we can avoid direct and thoughtful engagement with the world that we have participated in creating.

Report-for-the-shelf – linked to this is the preoccupation with reports. If we are not managing, guiding, being responsible even for our processes, then in return, there must at least be a report on it. Having lost the living link to organisational process, the report at least offers a tangible 'outcome'. While there is no doubt that reports are necessary at some points, the report-for-the-shelf is more often than not a relic. An outcome on a tick-box; offering little of quality – neither as historical record nor as guide for future action, yet suggesting the reassurance that *something* has been delivered, if not change itself.

Helplessness – all of these features of contemporary organisational life have many effects which are inter-

connected and mutually reinforcing. But most prominent, especially for those in positions of responsibility and authority, is a sense of overwhelming helplessness.

It is ironic – perhaps a defining feature of the world of development and of social change – that the higher you go up the system, the less power you experience. Managers and leaders may have the power to tell others what to do. And to limit and demand. But their power to really affect the institutions that they are a part of is completely constrained by the requirements of the systems that sit above and around them. The unassailability of these requirements holds us all captive. We are in thrall to the inexorable grip that requirements (objectives?) from above exert over us. And we have become frozen in our responses, the methods and practices that were devised in times of movement and response now exerting their own hypnotic power, enacted habitually, with little critical thought or innovation.

Compliance with 'requirements' has come to be equated with responsibility; pragmatism is the new operating principle; personal stress and boundless working hours a sign of diligence. Buried beneath all these coping mechanisms are experiences of intense personal helplessness. Buried even further, is the memory of the cause which brought us to this work in the first place and the belief that committed social action can make a difference.

So much of what I have described here cuts to the heart of CDRA's work. Each difficulty described above is found in the work that we do. We are external consultants. We write reports. We offer training. We run workshops (indeed it is our basic method). We do evaluations. We work within plans and statements of objectives. We work in and within partnership. We meet helplessness and despair in much of our work.

Our intention in working with others is to collaborate on strengthening organisational capacity and resilience … yet so often we catch ourselves working in relationships that risk becoming yet more organisational tasks, outsourced to us for resolution. These difficulties described present themselves to us as inherent challenges in our own practice and we ask of ourselves – how can we keep doing what we do, positioned as we are so precipitously close to the pitfalls described here? How can we sustain relationship, connectedness and responsibility into changed organisational practices, and in so doing, continue to fulfil our purpose in helping others to do the same?

This is no small task and as we live our way into its resolution, we find it permeates all aspects of our identity, strategy and practice. Some indications of what it all implies for us are shared in the pages that follow.

Towards making the alternative more concrete

RUBERT VAN BLERK

*"What we achieve inwardly
will change outer reality"*
Plutarch

Over the past years a trend has emerged worldwide in that more and more, the leading thrust in dealing with societal challenges has come from those parts where the resources and power are most concentrated, namely business, government and the north. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been set, the response driven largely through the organs of state with civil society, given its proximity to the development 'coalface', increasingly being seen as the implementers for this macro vision of development. Is the assertion being made here reasonable? Surely a process driven from the highest level is both appropriate and timely and represents a clear indication of recognition of a global threat to us all. Perhaps this generalisation may even be unfair to the many who serve with sincere intent at the various levels of this 'value' chain. This may be so, but I keep being reminded of Ghandi's words of 'being the change you want to see'. Greed and conservatism have experienced a sharp ascendency in recent times, leading to further entrenchment and dominance of the business and state sectors of society and thus diminishing the spaces for civil society organisations to act independently and freely to respond effectively to the challenges being faced by humanity. Development is a reciprocal process, and if singularly spurred by those with power – who have limited consciousness of their own need for change – it will only serve to further reinforce the conditions that give rise to poverty and marginalisation in our world.

So, what then is the role of our sector? Civil society organisations, together with people's movements, trade unions and other formations, are about a different impulse to that of the state and business. If the state is about ensuring equality between people, and business is about providing us with the means of living or survival, then surely civil society and those who act in it must also enjoy its unique purpose in service of humanity. Our sector is about freedom and agency; the freedom to act and respond creatively out of a deeper sense of that which is best about our human selves, towards creating a better society for all. The challenge is to take this responsibility seriously, in the face of all these disempowering (top down) partnerships that are beginning to characterise the work of our sector. We have to face the fact that more and more we are organising ourselves around the plethora of development projects that need to be delivered. Increasingly we are becoming defined by these projects, losing our sense of individuality and purpose as organisations. Are we comfortable with this emerging reality? Is it about using organisation to deliver projects, or using projects to build organisation, and through the latter, to better serve humanity?

What then is the general practice of our sector? From my perspective, having worked with many NGOs, a lot of energy is put into planning for implementation based on an analysis of the particular problem focus. The logical framework is a useful tool to do this and details the broad goal and objectives, along with inputs, outputs and indicators for achieving the desired outcomes of a specified intervention. Furthermore, these planned activities are time bound and can therefore neatly fit into the budget cycles of donors as well as being specific enough to easily account for the dispensing of resources according to the mutually agreed upon framework. Within this, monitoring and evaluation cycles keep track of project progress, and where the inevitable deviations occur, that the subsequent changes are properly justified and motivated. The clarion call is for better effectiveness, efficiency and relevance as we struggle to become more business-like in our ability to perform on our stated objectives. Funding agencies are increasingly seeking relationships with civil society organisations that have the

capacity to behave in this way.

This makes for a situation where everybody can potentially be happy. The ultimate 'beneficiaries' get the services or material resources that are designed to improve their lives, NGOs are sustainable while attaching themselves to the causes they identify with, and donors are able to justify, to the institutions that support them, expenditure towards attaining the MDGs. Ultimately it is hoped that the latter institutions are able to in turn account to the tax payer, from where the resources they are entrusted with originate, and so complete the cycle of accountability.

This can make complete sense as being an attempt from the top to harness all the talents of society towards achieving outcomes on a scale hitherto unimagined and an entirely appropriate response to a challenge of global proportions. But are we not at risk of becoming completely absorbed in a machine-like process of inputs and outputs that stymies our innate ability to think and create? For all the good intentions behind our project frameworks, have we stopped to think about the basic assumptions that we are making about development through the implementation of various activities that we have planned for? How many of us are conscious of the causal linkage in change processes, assumed by the project planning matrix? Is development as definable as our planning frameworks assume? Failure to interrogate the worldview behind our practices will only serve to compromise the results of our actions, through undermining the strategies and methods we employ to achieve our goals. Sadly the latter has become commonplace in our sector and poses a major threat to the relevance, and ultimately, the sustainability of these interventions, as well as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) themselves. In CDRA we are advocating a practice where thinking occupies equal space to doing, so that we are continually building a practice that truly fosters creativity and innovation.

There is growing frustration, yet simultaneously a greater honesty about the fact that we have little to show for all the resources, both financial and material, that have been deployed in the name of development. Practitioners the world over are asking deeper questions. Many are intuitively seeking and connecting

with alternative principles and practices. Some have even been bold enough to begin experimenting with alternative ways of working. However, we are often confounded by 'how to make it work' and many struggle to convince management or donors of the merits of supporting such an orientation.

By simply dismissing apparent confusion or lack of appreciation for alternative practices as 'they just don't get it or don't have the will', we opt out of an important challenge. In facing it, we have to ask: How do we build bridges between diverse ideas, paradigms and positions? Is it just about using the right words to explain or describe it better, or is it something more substantive? How do we forge connections that help us to see our next steps towards a more responsive approach that emboldens us to let go of familiar and less useful practices, and enables less familiar, but potentially more promising ways of facilitating the change we hope to achieve?

In an attempt to face the self-imposed challenge of clearly articulating our version of developmental practice, in a way that both inspires and presents enough firm ground beneath it, I present the following core elements:

The need for a new theory of change: The dominant theory of change in our sector is based on the positivist paradigm, with its world of tangible objects and linear cause/effect relationships. In this view of things, we are separate from the phenomena we are trying to change. We can differentiate things into the finest detail through good planning, increasing our ability to predict and to act. Thorough plans and even tools mean that we have better control, greater efficiencies, greater capacity to increase scale and less time wasted – thinking. The result is that most development interventions are about structural shifts, building technical capacity and delivering resources.

A new theory of change has to address and make sense of the enormous complexity that we face in our work reality. In our various working contexts, we are dealing with living and constantly evolving systems of which we form a part. A concept which has become more frequently used nowadays is that of complex adaptive systems (CAS), which more aptly tries to describe these phenomena. Practices that are based

on such an understanding have less of an emphasis on control and a greater openness to the emergent conditions that require appropriate responses at any given point in time. A practical start to developing our own theories of change is to become more conscious, by interrogating more deeply the assumptions that underlie our current practices.

Organisational sovereignty: CSOs are all unique organisations on their own paths of development. How often do we think of ourselves as continuously unfolding entities, following our own path, as we simultaneously work towards the transformation of others? We need to own and celebrate our unique identities as organisations, in so doing protecting our freedom to create and innovate in an authentic and responsive manner. Independence comes before interdependence. The synergistic partnerships of shared purpose that we so desire can only materialise when organisations and initiatives unite out of a clear and independent sense of who and what they are. Sovereignty of organisation can be likened to an individual's sense of ego and self esteem; that set of beliefs and attitudes that define the relationship with self and others. An organisation with a weak sense of self will see itself as a victim of its future and the elements in its environment. Donors often reinforce this by attempting to rescue in unhelpful ways, or by being less conscious of the power they wield in the relationship, or even by being oblivious to their own paths of development. This is obviously a reciprocal situation, with challenges for both CSOs and the institutions that support their work.

Clarifying purpose: in a rapidly changing environment, this will be continuous work: How many of us will be able to, at a snap of a finger, describe what our organisation is about and how it presumes to achieve this mission in its working context? I often struggle with this myself, although I find it a very stimulating exercise. In CDRA we are experiencing a significant moment in our history, where the ability to nail down a clear purpose for now, has become ever so important. If organisations are not geared towards constantly reminding themselves of their purpose, and adapting to changing circumstances, then they are at risk of

falling asleep. I recently worked with two institutions engaged in facilitating diverse and complex partnership processes. In both instances there were difficulties in clarifying the role of staff members in their engagement across the boundaries of government and civil society. When purpose is defined higher up and the responsibility for implementation is deferred lower down, with insufficient participation across the hierarchy, then things are bound to get fuzzy, the further you are from where decisions are made. Clarifying purpose needs to be a participatory process that involves all levels of the organisation and across partnerships. This will help focus energies and makes us more confident in knowing where the real work is, allowing for sharper and more coherent strategies.

Learning one's way into the future: If we truly believe that our organisations are complex adaptive systems, similar to the situations that we are acting in, then we cannot ignore the responsibility of making learning a conscious activity. The social world, which forms our field of work, is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon. Fact of the matter is that we know so little of it. Instead of continuing to rely on the tried, tested, and failed practices of our familiar paradigms, can we begin to really value what we do not know, as a way in to discovering a new approach to harnessing human development? We are at the beginning of developing this new practice that seeks to authentically respond to the issues we face. Our responsibility is to nurture this practice into the future, so that we become better at creating the conditions for a more humane and sustainable world. Therefore, can we begin to see organisational learning and practice development as being part of the work? To do this does not necessarily require the creation of new spaces, but rather to change the quality of the existing spaces where we meet, plan, monitor and evaluate our work to meet the challenges of innovation in order to make good on our best intentions.

Relationships as the means and the end: We are ultimately defined by our relationships. How would the world that we are seeking to create be reflected in the relationships we have with each other? Wherever we may find ourselves in our work, the development intervention can only begin once relationship is formed. How the relationship is formed will inevitably impact on the level of trust and openness, which in turn will impact on the ability to truly understand what is needed, and how best to address this need through intervention. We have to acknowledge that power is at the centre of relationships, and that the change we are working to achieve is about shifting this power, wherever it exploits, undermines and dehumanises. To what extent are we aware of the power we hold in our relationships with others, while dispensing resources and know-how? If shifting power relationships is seen to be a supreme indicator of a more inclusive society, then surely authentic participation is as much an outcome as a prerequisite for development. In development processes, relationship follows the path of dependence, to independence and eventual interdependence, with concomitant challenges and crises along the way.

CDRA has recognised that our approach has broader applicability beyond the realm of organisational development into the basic field practice of the sector. More and more we are meeting and working with others who have similarly explored and adopted different ways of thinking and doing. We are discovering the basic character of this emerging practice, including features such as those described above. As we continue on our own journey of exploration and learning, we are eager to unite with 'co-travellers' towards building this developmental practice into the future.

New directions, impulses and innovations in practice

NOMVULA DLAMINI AND DOUG REELER

"Come, my friends
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world"
Alfred Tennyson

In an article entitled *"Politics of Alternative Development"*, Rui Mesquita Cordeiro[3] reminds us that the dominant development paradigm failed to bring about changes and provide sustainable solutions to the challenges of poverty and inequality; the practices that flow from this mechanistic thinking about development have not succeeded in resolving the social and environmental challenges the world faces. Into the 21st century we continue to see a world that is paralysed by poverty and inequality – the divide between the wealthy and the poor has grown to alarming levels. Vast numbers of people continue to be marginalised and excluded and exploitation of people and the environment has become common practice.

The failure of the dominant paradigm has given rise to widespread dissatisfaction and this has awakened and stimulated the need for change. The need for new directions in development thinking that could translate into alternative, innovative organisational practices and approaches is a sentiment that has been part of the development discourse for a long time – academics, policy-makers, practitioners and social activists have been preoccupied by the need for change and their efforts have resulted in impulses and innovations that seek to shape development thinking and practice in new directions that hold potential for new possibilities.

We have come across many processes of innovation, transformation and creative impulses that offer hopeful new directions in development and organisational practices. Such innovations are becoming increasingly important as they offer a renewal and reorientation to processes of change and transformation – they ask for new conceptions of power, values, social organisation and re-definition of relationships. It is difficult to describe these innovations fully; the best we can do is to offer modest observations of what strike us as exciting and inspiring impulses and innovations that should be seen as a starting point for cultivating genuinely developmental practices. Described below are a handful of these innovations, not 'best practices'[4], but fruitful or good practice to learn from.

The world of small-holder agriculture

We draw learning and inspiration from the world of small-holder or peasant agriculture and the sector of scientists, activists and practitioners who have dedicated themselves to supporting the survival and development of family-farming agriculture. Our work with NGO and farming organisations has helped us to see this as so much more than just an economic sphere of development, but rather a culture, a way of life, hopeful, meaningful and apparently more sustainable than the dehumanised industrialisation of modernised agriculture. It is of particular significance because close to half the world's population survives on family-farming, yet it is under threat from all sides. We have come to believe that the survival and thriving of family-farming is in the interest of all humanity.

Some decades ago development practice in agriculture in the South was focused on trainings, on transferring supposedly superior technologies from the 'developed' North to the 'undeveloped' of the

---

3 Cordeiro, R.M. (2007) "On Alternative Development". Accessed from www.igloo.org/politica/onaltern. Date accessed 15th May 2008.

4 'Best practice' is a colonising concept which can undermine local practices.

South. This simply did not work and gave way to more researched approaches, sensitive to local agricultural conditions, but still focused on the expertise of the scientist and the extension worker. Still missing the mark, the centre of gravity shifted further as practitioners entered into more facilitative and collaborative relationships with farmers, marrying indigenous with outside technologies. More recently, in this last decade, a further shift has taken place with farmers at the centre of leading change, approaches emphasising farmer consciousness, organisation and political mobilisation around global issues which impact local experience (most recently climate change), sophisticated innovation processes, networks and horizontal learning alliances, as well as "multi-functional agriculture, livelihood/food systems and value chains across multiple scales, from local to global [over] long time frames."[5]

These changes in practice are often judged as modest, qualified and tentative, perhaps understandably, given the persistent fragility of so many rural societies under the ominous threat of climate change and relentless globalisation. But a more appreciative view has to marvel at the incredible progress of human relationships and consciousness represented by this evolution. The world has much to learn from this sector and it requires much more of our support.

Rights-based Approaches

The jury is still out on many versions of a Rights-Based Approach (RBA) as articulated and promoted by several international NGOs (INGOs). In South Africa many NGOs, born out of the rights-based struggle against apartheid, have been slightly bemused and sometimes irritated by the evangelical fervour and formulaic rhetoric of some Northern RBA practitioners ("Every need can be turned into a right!" Really, even the need for motherly love or courageous leadership?). More recently, though, we have seen more nuanced articulations of a RBA surfacing, borne out of experience and critique. We also appreciate that in sectors and countries without much exposure to indigenous rights-based struggles, the RBA does lend some wel-

come political backbone to conventional development practice, focused as it so often is on purely palliative local economic approaches, i.e. poverty alleviation rather than poverty eradication.

Through our growing interaction with them, we have been particularly inspired by ActionAid International's shift in recent years towards a RBA practice based upon advancing the "power and rights of women, girls, and other poor and excluded people" within the following interacting strategies and objectives:

Basic needs, conditions of poor and excluded people (rights holders). Rooting work in concrete positive changes to their conditions.

Rights consciousness, awareness, capacity, organisation, mobilisation of poor and excluded people (rights holders). Supporting poor and excluded people in understanding and organising themselves to claim their rights.

Organisation and mobilisation of civil society in support of poor people. Organising and mobilising civil society in solidarity with poor and excluded people for their rights.

Advocacy – policies and practices of state and non-state institutions (duty bearers). Shifting or strengthening policies and practices of duty bearers in favour of the rights of poor and excluded people.

In this 'model' is motivated a holistic or comprehensive approach, suggesting that all four areas of practice need attention to secure meaningful and sustainable change. It offers a compellingly lucid and ambitious articulation of practice which recognises the centrality of the sovereign organisations of the poor and excluded and of civil society alliances in support, to challenge the policies and practices of the state, but all grounded in the daily reality and experience of people. Although it is early in the shift to this approach, we have heard some inspiring stories of change of local grassroots organisations and coalitions being supported by ActionAid on all continents to take on local and national challenges, engaging governments, even in inter-

---

5 Farmer First Revisited, Innovation for Agricultural Research and Development Workshop Summary, April 2008, Ian Scoomes, John Thompson and Robert Chambers. This workshop on innovation for agricultural research and development paints a compelling picture of the evolution of the sector over the last few decades.

national fora, advancing consciousness, confidence and organisation of the poor and excluded.

New social movements

The emergence of social movements has contributed hugely towards development discourse and offering alternatives towards social change. From the 1960s, through the peace, women's and other movements, social movements became central to helping civil society to gain force and achieve some emancipation to do 'politics' outside of the institutionalised framework. New social movements consist mainly of informal social networks and work through people's agency – development and actions aimed at social change are anchored in people's agency.

Through the women's movement, for example, the struggles towards the emancipation of women across the world were intensified and over about three decades issues pertaining to the emancipation and empowerment of women gained centrality and translated into increased freedom, access and opportunities for women. The women's movement ushered in new intellectual thinking – it contributed towards raising consciousness about the disenfranchisement of women and spurred into motion a 'fight' that was taken up by women themselves. This consciousness about the need for the emancipation and empowerment of women was systematically incorporated into various aspects of society and also into development thinking and thus radically influenced the programmes and practices of organisations.

More recently in South Africa, the work of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is an example of civil society pushing for government policy to reflect socio-economic and health rights in the post-apartheid era. A research study by Mandisa Mbali[6] helps us to understand that through its relentless campaigning, the TAC has pushed for government policy to reflect socio-economic rights to health care in the post-apartheid era. In its endeavours to widen access to anti-retroviral drugs, the driving force has come mainly through the agency of people living with HIV and AIDS. The TAC has, through its campaigning, taken advantage of and used new political and legal spaces created in post-apartheid South Africa.

Pieterse and Van Donk[7] offer insights on how the TAC, in order to achieve its objectives, adopted a variety of advocacy and campaigning strategies – it managed to combine mass-mobilisation with sound legal and political strategies. Using informal networks to provide a micro-mobilisation context, the TAC has taken full advantage of the new legal and political spaces in post-apartheid South Africa. These informal networks provide a critical vehicle for ordinary people's participation in public policy processes.

Through articulation of its campaigns, the TAC has contributed towards reclaiming the rights of people – these campaigns have provided avenues for poor and marginalised groupings to impact the distribution of drugs for treatment, social exclusion, claiming power and exerting influence in the South African landscape. Further, from within civil society, the TAC has been inspirational in developing a dynamic relationship with government through which it has opposed it on certain issues and cooperated with it on others. The dynamic nature of this relationship has certainly enabled it to invoke rights-based discourses in the new democratic spaces for the realisation of socio-economic rights.

Both the women's movement and the TAC are examples of how new social movements can be important sources of cultural innovation – they contributed towards creating a new culture pertaining to the rights of women and people living with HIV and AIDS respectively by garnering legitimacy for establishing new forms and infusing new norms, values and beliefs into social structures – they have to be recognised and appreciated for being instrumental in creating a new consciousness.

New directions in evaluation practice

Traditional evaluation practice, as most of us have experienced, is an externally-driven process that is used as an accountability tool that focuses on 'reporting on results'. This view of evaluation makes assumptions

---

6 Mbali, M (2005). "The Treatment Action Campaign and the history of rights-based, patient-driven HIV/AIDS activism in South Africa." Research Report No. 29, Centre for Civil Society Publications Collective, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

7 Pieterse, E. & van Donk, M. (2002) "Incomplete Ruptures: The Political Economy of Realising Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa". Paper prepared for Colloquium on the Grootboom Judgement and Socio-Economic Rights, Strand, 15-17 March 2002.

about solving social problems and while such exercises can produce useful insights, they seldom contribute meaningfully to the development and learning of organisations.

Having become disillusioned with the traditional approach, development practitioners, organisations and academics have been prompted to explore new ways of assessing social impact – many recognise and acknowledge that the social realm in which we work demands a different approach to evaluation. Within the social realm, the emerging programmes, organisations and communities we engage with require dynamic approaches that are more 'real time' and help organisations establish with clarity 'what they need to know now in order to be where they want to be in future'.

A research study undertaken by Foundation Strategy Group (FSG) Social Impact Advisors,[8] a nonprofit organisation based in the USA, highlights emerging approaches to evaluation in the field of philanthropy that increases the effectiveness of foundations and their grantees. This initiative enabled FSG Social Impact Advisors to develop insightful approaches to evaluation that, when used, enable foundations to achieve greater social impact. The findings reflect a shift away from traditional evaluation towards a more forward-looking orientation to evaluation. According to the findings of the research study, evaluation should produce an ongoing flow of practical, pragmatic information rather than a once-off report that often ends up on a shelf. A forward-looking orientation demands

8 Mark Kramer with Rebecca Graves, Jason Hirschhorn and Leigh Fiske (April 2007) "From Insight to Action: New Directions in Foundation Evaluation". FSG Social Impact Advisors – research report.

that evaluation should not only be about telling an organisation whether it has succeeded or failed, it should really be about learning.

However, for evaluation to be about learning it has to be incorporated routinely into the life of the organisation; as a practice it should be embedded in the organisational processes – it should be an integral part of organisational life. It is only once this has been achieved that evaluation can contribute meaningfully to the development and change of the organisation. In other words, evaluation should live at the core of the purpose, practice and learning of the organisation. While many of us recognise that evaluation can be a useful management tool, the ultimate challenge for many organisations is to incorporate it at the planning stage. Where this challenge is embraced, evaluation

serves to establish a baseline that helps the organisation define realistic objectives and be clear about the impact it desires to achieve.

We would be remiss not to mention the interesting and challenging approach to evaluation practice offered by Michael Quinn Patton.[9] The simple definition of developmental evaluation as "processes and activities that support program, project, product, personnel and/or organisational development" belies the challenges it holds. The idea that evaluation practice should support development and change within an organisation is one that particularly resonates with us. For those who have the courage to embrace it, developmental evaluation demands a shift in thinking – it does not buy into the notion of the once-off evaluation that culminates in a report. Instead, it sees evaluation as a

9 Michael Quinn Patton "Developmental Evaluation" in Evaluation Practice Vol 15, No.3, 1994. JAI Press, Inc.

process of learning where there is "collaboration between the evaluator and organisation to conceptualise, design and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continuous improvement, adaptation and intentional change".

In line with this thinking, developmental evaluation changes the role of the evaluator in a major way. Not only does it require that the evaluator form a longer-term relationship with the organisation, it also requires that the evaluator should not be passing judgement – instead, the approach emphasises that the role of evaluator is to help the organisation make meaning of the unfolding process and outcomes. The evaluator's primary function, therefore, not as 'external driver' but as part of a team, is to elucidate team discussions with evaluative data and to facilitate decision-making in the development process. Instead of the usual once-off intervention, the evaluator accompanies the organisation on its journey of learning, development and change. In this way, the evaluator is able to support the organisation to work with new questions that emerge from the changing process.

The challenge is to design the evaluation as a process that allows for multiple voices and perspectives to be included – from the most powerful to the least powerful and create a situation where the voice of the evaluator becomes only one among many and never *"the dominant voice"*. So, the entire process becomes one of helping the organisation develop the capacity for self-evaluation and self-accountability (locating accountability within the organisation). Such a process has to be flexible and responsive. A further advantage is that it allows for immediate feedback.

A developmental approach demands that we recognise, respect and take into consideration the life processes which underlie social organisms. As an approach it is appropriate for those who work in social development where things emerge and continually change, and where time periods are fluid and forward-looking. This approach has no place for artificially imposed demands by funding and project cycles with predetermined outcomes. Evaluation then becomes an ongoing, developmental process of incremental change informed by the information generated as the process unfolds. This genuinely makes evaluation about learning,

innovation, and change rather than external accountability. Unlike traditional approaches, developmental evaluation affords organisations opportunity to work on issues that matter with imagination and creativity – it expands and creates possibility.

What unites these innovative, alternative practices?

These impulses have reminded us that the arenas of social change are characterised by complexity and working into the unknown with emergence – this demands creativity and intuition. We have to remember that new impulses emerge in between waves of fear, pessimism, destruction, disappointment and hopelessness, and where they take root, open up possibilities for renewal, transformation and revitalisation.

Socially, these innovative, creative practices give hope to marginalised, excluded, desperate and exasperated people as well as to devoted practitioners – they motivate them to keep on striving for a better life. Where embraced, they enable social changes that lead to an increase in human security, freedom (from fear and want) and self-determination. Their real power lies in that they give voice, power and freedom to people to decide about their own present and future. They point to social justice, human rights, humaneness and environmental sustainability. For organisations in development they hold promise for a space for new thinking and questioning of present development practices. From a moral perspective, they are grounded in and committed to people – they ensure the centrality of people in actions.

Building resilience in times of complexity and change

CDRA as an example of organisational sovereignty

DESIREE PAULSEN

"The only constant is change.
Change is the only constant.
Change alone is unchanging."
Heraclitus

I believe that the reasons for CDRA's resilience over 21 years in a volatile and ever-changing development sector is that it has always remained true to its purpose and believed in what it was doing – the organisation has demonstrated a strong courage of conviction over the years. Where did this emanate from? I believe that it emanated from different sources – from a sense of passion, commitment and a belief in doing what it felt was right, from responding to the challenges of the times, from articulating an alternative view of development which challenges dominant and restrictive paradigms and practices, from developing and building an alternative practice, from constant questioning of our own practice and articulating this as honestly and authentically as we could. As we became more adept at articulating our own practice, we were able to enter into new forms of relationships with clients and donors while maintaining a strong identity, clear sense of direction and working out of a particular organisational attitude. This has taken hard work as well as willingness and openness to learn.

Change is the context

As our work focuses on the interaction between development and organisation, the starting point is that we see and engage with organisations as living systems that are dynamic, alive and are on their unique, natural paths of growth, development and change. Change therefore, is an ever present feature – it precipitates development and can result in new growth or even death of an organisation.

Organisations, similar to other living systems – human beings, groups, communities – have to constantly adapt and position themselves to survive in a world that is constantly evolving and in flux. Sometimes change can be sudden and drastic; at other times it is slow, almost inconspicuous until it is upon us. Whichever way it manifests, change wakes us up to the realities of life and forces us to act – whether in our personal, organisational or societal lives. Change is part of life – we will always be faced with challenges that seek to wake us up and force us to act accordingly. This is the natural course of life.

Still, the complexity of life is mind-boggling as it can involve change at many different levels and layers – as individuals we change as we grow and develop, we are also part of organisations on their paths of development and our organisations intervene into a society that is changing, a world that is changing. Complexity and change can send us into a spin; there are instances where change can be overwhelming. But, change can also give a sense of reassurance and acceptance. In all living systems change is inevitable and must be embraced as part of the journey – when this happens, it enables us to respond and find points of connection, we learn to survive, but also to anticipate, to prepare for the unforeseen, to grow and develop to new heights and depths.

In order to embrace change we have to be flexible, innovative and resourceful. In the social realm, we

work in a world of constant change and complexity where things are emerging and unfolding all the time and this makes the role of organisations in development particularly difficult. In South Africa, organisations working in the arena of social transformation attempt to bring about change by contributing towards renewing and rebuilding a society which is in crisis; a society that has been stripped, deconstructed, denigrated. The post-apartheid era which we thought would help us realise 'a better life for all' is perhaps the most difficult time of our transition – it has awakened us to the challenges we face. The fibre of society that has been damaged, undone and tampered with by decades of colonialism, structured-apartheid and ingrained racism cannot be changed in a short time – transformation takes time.

Perhaps, important questions to be considered at this moment are: In these difficult times, working and living in a world of constant change and complexity, how do organisations remain relevant and connected to their purpose and identity? How do organisations work in a way that transforms relationships of unequal power? The answers to these questions may lie in a term we have recently begun to work with – 'sovereignty'. I believe that we may have hope for ourselves as organisations if we can begin to internalise this idea, become more 'sovereign' and work in a way that will enable the sector at large to genuinely transform practices and relationships that constrain, marginalise and exclude.

CDRA's experience – building resilience and sovereignty

What has worked for CDRA and in many ways has been the heart and soul of our organisation that has kept it alive, relevant and of value to the broader sector, is our internal learning process which happens over one week at the end of every month. During this time we suspend work in the field, and focus on meeting as an organisation – we come together into a sacred space, set up in advance and ingrained in our calendar and the life of the organisation. This is a space that is fiercely protected, and may not be encroached upon – it has sustained us through changing times and has contributed towards building resilience and maintaining organisational sovereignty.

It has not always been easy and smooth sailing – at times it has been exhausting, at times sticky and edgy, at times tiring, at times we got into a rut and stuck patterns and fell asleep in the rhythm. But, throughout, we tried to remain conscious and awake and find new ways to stimulate ourselves, to challenge ourselves more critically, to learn new ways of doing. Sustaining an internal learning rhythm, such as our homeweek, requires commitment, patience, creativity and openness and, most of all, it requires the participation of all. I see our learning space as the bedrock from which we are able to work into a complex and ever changing world; it has provided the foundation that has helped us to deal with change but also to facilitate our own changes as individuals and as organisation.

Building resilience and sovereignty in a context that is continually changing is, in CDRA's experience, a developmental process within which the following core elements lie:

Building resilience from the inside out – by this we mean any change starts with the self; if you want to bring about change, you have to start with working on your own change processes first. As practitioners we work extensively on personal / self development through our processes within the organisation such as peer mentoring, reflection sessions, staff development (in-house) and performance appraisals.

Strengthening organisation from the inside out through conscious learning – in CDRA this happens through our homeweeks where conversations and dialogue are built into the functioning of the organisation – we are encouraged to bring our positive experiences and personal practice challenges, as well as the difficult experiences, as case studies and reflective writing pieces for sharing with the teams.

Engage with purpose and strategy – not as an event, but as an ongoing process through which we deeply and continually question our identity/purpose and search for meaning in what we do and how we do it.

Working into complex systems by working with, encouraging and facilitating emergence – by this we mean working with what is emerging, working in the moment, intuitively and creatively so that we are able to respond dynamically. Our learning space is

designed in a way that enables us to open ourselves to working with what emerges – each homeweek informs and shapes the next one. In this way we work with an exciting, unfolding, truly transformative approach that is conscious and a dynamic cycle of self-fulfilment as an organisation – where we work with intentions, and how we make them reality both personally and organisationally.

Creating an environment for quality conversations and open spaces for building authentic community – in order to have the kinds of meaningful interaction that can really allow us to work with and through change – it is through this human connection that we are able to do what we need to do and become what we need to become. It is these kinds of spaces where ideas are born and shared, where frustrations are aired, where we are able to affirm and hold each other so that we can work through relationships built on trust. This is perhaps the best and at the same time the hardest part of all – where we find each other and build organisation based on shared values and purpose.

Build leadership from all levels and allow new forms of leadership to emerge – it is important that leadership not only be held in position but leadership through processes and taking responsibility – collective, shared, consultative leadership processes. This demands a different view of leadership, different from leadership that is entrenched in position – what we are saying is that leadership lives and can be expressed no matter where you are positioned in the organisation; it is about creating spaces and encouraging a culture that allows for leadership to emerge throughout all levels in an organisation.

Build practice, process and product – ensuring that we understand what it is we are attempting to do in the world, what it is we are offering to the world and a shared understanding of how we will do it.

With all these elements comes a clarity and confidence that is built over time and constantly revised and updated and through which you return continuously to the core values and principles that inform and underpin the work of the organisation.

In dealing with complexity and change it is said that on the other side of complexity lies simplicity …

so beyond complexity is a return to the simple to see the essence of what we need to do. I would like to end with some beautifully simple and profound words:

> *We are here to do;*
> *And through doing to learn;*
> *And through learning to know;*
> *And through knowing to experience wonder;*
> *And through wonder to attain wisdom;*
> *And through wisdom to find simplicity;*
> *And through simplicity to give attention;*
> *And through attention to see what needs to be done.*
> Ben Hei Hei[10]

Surely in the process of this poem lies the path to sovereignty which doesn't seem that difficult after all. Organisations in development have been constrained by the dominant paradigm; they have been forced to conform and have been stripped of the dynamism and creativity that is the essence of civil society. Yet, if we search deep within ourselves and create spaces to meet and connect humanly, we will find a way through the messiness and dullness – searching deep within ourselves can enable us to connect to our wisdom and find ways of building organisations that can influence the thinking and practice of the sector and awaken it to the immense value of sovereign organisation.

---

10 Hei Hei, Ben quoted in Kehoe, John (1999) "The Practice of Happiness". Zoetic Inc, Montreal.

In conclusion, it is evident that, in order to meaningfully address the social and environmental challenges – inequality, exclusion and marginalisation – we need new organisational forms that will enlarge possibilities, expand the freedom of people and restore hope. For this, we need courage to shift our orientation towards a different conception of power that is not embedded in hierarchy and control. Instead, we have to see power as influence and the ideal organisational form for exerting this kind of power is the network.

We need organisational forms that will allow for redefinition of the relationships between the centre and the periphery – relationships that recognise the interconnectedness of the world, relationships that do not entrench inequality: horizontal relationships. These hold the potential for building solidarity and strengthening the voice and efforts of people and for ensuring that development is oriented towards local actors. They anchor development in people's agency while enabling equitable social distribution of resources and power.

We need to build organisational forms through which collective influence can be mobilised for accessing resources – it is critical that organisations in development be deeply embedded in communities and that they be underpinned by values of cooperation, inclusiveness and participation.

Finally, we need to cultivate organisational approaches, processes and practices that are geared towards enhancing organisational thinking and doing – this demands that we see development as a complex and dynamic process that needs to be tended and nurtured. When working with organisations, we should respect and value their attributes and their unique paths of development as well as strengthen their ability to learn and adapt in a complex, challenging and ever-changing world – through this we will increase their effectiveness towards increased resilience and sovereignty.
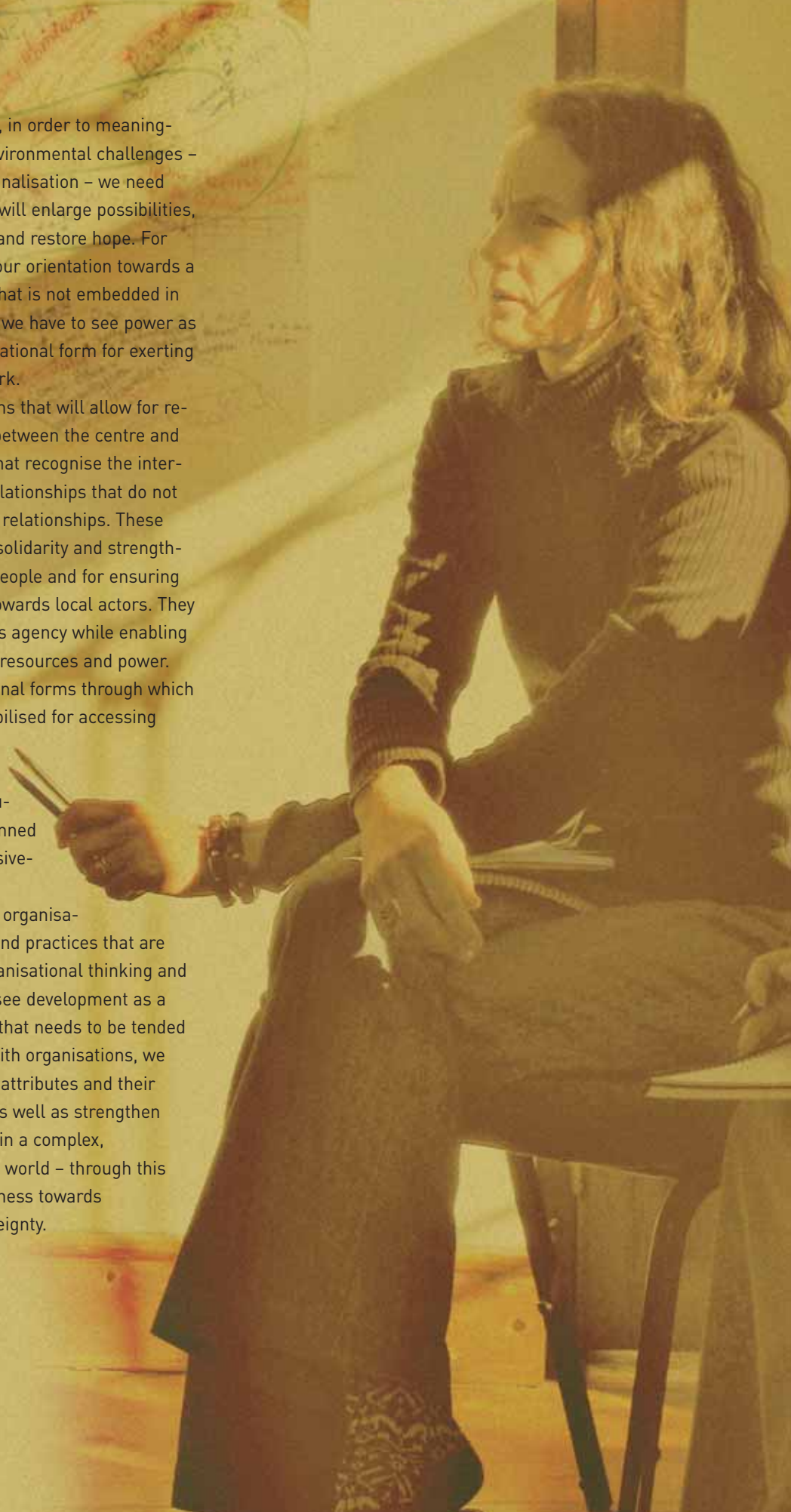
CDRA Itself

Donors

We are grateful to our donors for their support and partnership:

Cordaid

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienste (EED)

Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS)

Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA)

Swedish Mission Council (SMC)

Board

Nomvula Dlamini

Farid Esack

Peter Grove

Sisasenkosi Maboza

Shehnaz Meer

Mzwandile Msoki

Judith Mtsewu

Di Oliver (Chairperson)

James Taylor

Rory Wilson

We welcomed Rory Wilson on to our Board of Directors, and said goodbye to the Right Reverend Rubin Phillip, who has resigned from the Board. Bishop Rubin served for many years on our Board, as Chairperson for 12 of them. We will always hold him in the highest esteem, and remember with him with love for his humanity, wisdom, humour, warmth and principle.

Staff

Shelley Arendse

Nikki Bell

Nomvula Dlamini

Sandra Hill

Vuyelwa Jacobs

Sheila Mana

Lindani Mzamo

Linda Njambatwa

Desiree Paulsen

Siobhain Pothier

Doug Reeler

Bheki Skota

Sue Soal

Pauline Solomons

James Taylor

Marlene Tromp

Rubert Van Blerk

Vernon Weitz

> Velisa Maku, who worked as our receptionist for four years, died tragically in early 2008. Her kindness, her feisty, fun-loving personality, her big laugh and her passionate belief in justice are sorely missed by all of us. Velisa loved to write, and overleaf we include a reflective piece she wrote after the Biennial practice conference.

What we did

COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH

This strategy was chosen because of the large knowledge gap between what practitioners know from experience and what they perpetuate through their practice. In working towards closing the gap, three themes for research were proposed:

- Measurement: action research on a developmental approach and methodology for planning, monitoring and evaluation
- Participatory methods; horizontal learning
- Action research into action learning itself

An internal research group for CDRA practitioners has been formed to provide dedicated space, time,

support and guidance to practitioners with specific research projects, with the ultimate aim of 'collaborative knowledge creation'.

CDRA has become more directly engaged in the global discourse on evaluation, and one of our practitioners, Sue Soal, was invited to present the keynote address at an international conference on evaluation held in Australia in September 2007.

We co-hosted two Collaborative Action Research Groups (CARs) focusing on horizontal learning, involving 10 practitioners from six organisations.

Courses

Seven courses were planned, and all were run, plus an extra unplanned course, which was run in Sweden. 118 participants, with an average of 16 people per course, attended the courses in Developmental Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (two courses); Principles and Skills of Developmental Practice (two courses); Group Facilitation (two courses); and Managing People Developmentally (one course).

Organisational Accompaniment

We provided a wide range of organisational development support services to 55 organisations. 73% of these were South African; 11% were in other parts of Africa; and 16% beyond Africa. We continue to increase the possibility of impacting on the sector as a whole by working from the community level (CBOs) through local, national, regional and international NGOs, as well as government departments and international development agencies.

We continue to receive more requests for our services than we can meet.

Internal Learning and Governance

We planned two full Board meetings, three finance and three executive sub-committee meetings, and nine homeweeks. All of these were implemented.

We also launched an innovative process of organisation evaluation – essentially a rigorous self-managed evaluation using external consultants for limited aspects of the work. It is being documented as a case study in participatory self-evaluation. The final outcomes will be distilled shortly.

Publication and Dissemination

In the last year we have published:
– one book
– one nugget
– four articles for our website
– six articles and papers in other websites, books and journals

Two papers have been presented at conferences Three publications by writers outside of CDRA have been based on our work

One of our books, Holding Infinity, has been prescribed for the second year running at UNISA (University of South Africa) and a request has been made by a national health department for permission to translate the book into Braille.

Dialogue

Nine dialogue initiatives were hosted at the centre in the last year.

The second Biennial practice conference was held in May 2007. 83 participants from 15 countries came together around the theme "Revealing practice, reimagining purpose, claiming our place". A multimedia report of the Biennial has been produced and is available as a pamphlet, a DVD and an interactive CD-ROM.

Pretty shoes from McGregor
in memory of Velisa Maku

WHAT TO DO WHEN NOT NEEDED
THE DUTY OF AN ADMINISTRATION PERSON BEHIND THE SCENES/
LOGISTICS OF A BIG CONFERENCE
A PRESENT FOR MYSELF FROM MCGREGOR

McGregor, a village 2 hours from Cape Town, lies at the end of the road from Robertson in the Western Cape, Recently this village was a host to more than eighty Bienniel Conference participants, from 15 different countries. I am one of the team members on the administration part of this big conference. Part of my role this year was to help make registration go more smoothly. On the drive to this conference, we anticipate the excitement of meeting and registering all these strangers brought together by our organisation.

Arriving at the small village that is surrounded by mountains , with my two colleagues, we are told that we are very early for the registration. Feeling not needed, we decide to take a small walk down the one street of the very small town. Looking for interesting things that can keep us busy in the meantime. Spotting a craft shop. Going into the craft shop with no intentions to buy, have not even brought my purse.

Craft shop being a craft shop, with all sorts, on the left side that we decided on, maybe because of Siobhain who is our librarian, are old novels for sale. Browse through the novels and we have the shop assistant directing us to other things in the shop, like the McGregor olives, to taste and then buy.

Not tasting the olives, not particularly fond of this fruit anyway. Going for the shoes. They are so pretty, in bright light colours, your yellows, oranges, limes, baby blues etc. The price, I can't believe this, have to confirm with the shop assistant. It is true, they are under R100. Have already called Marlene and Siobhain, my two colleagues , to be excited with me. I forget all other feelings prior to this, my spirit is lifted, I am totally 'high' feeling like a female species at the moment. All I need is for one of them to agree to lend me

money, that I had not planned to spend. Siobhain can, that makes my McGregor trip complete. I buy the pretty looking shoe, all excited, do not even notice that I was not given a carrier bag when paying. The pretty chocolates on display or other craft like earrings, were nothing compared to my shoe. This is a summer shoe, and it is the beginning of winter, but then who cares because I might never come back to this village and be so excited.

Pauline, our other colleague, calls on Marlene's cell phone, now we are needed. Getting to the registration hall, setting up the registration tables, covering them, putting boxes in order. Finishing this task as well, some time before the bus carrying the participants arrives. One or two people arrive, we register them. Just before the bus arrives we all need to relieve ourselves. When I come back, I come back to a queue of people waiting to be greeted, registered and directed to the next venue.

One might ask why the need to be needed, or the need for a distraction, maybe I just don't have the patience to hang around and needed that pretty shoe to occupy the spaces between the buzz of my duty.

Books we've read this year

In this facet of our report, we share some of the thinking and writing which has had deep impact on us this year. Books we keep returning to, books whose ideas we've shared with colleagues, on courses, in consultations; books that have supported or challenged something within us; books that have made us either gasp, laugh or cry; books that have inspired us to think, feel and act differently.

Laying Ghosts to Rest
Dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa*
Mamphela Ramphele
2008, Tafelberg: Cape Town

This book is written at a critical time in South Africa's journey towards transformation. Mamphela Ramphele is able to value the enormity of what has been achieved from a depth and breadth of understanding unique to her practical engagement within and outside the country. She applies her knowledge and experience of health science, education and the politics of international development to shed a piercing light on the immensity of the challenges we face. Her commitment to the importance of self-reliance in an interconnected world; to both the scientific and the spiritual; and to excellence and equality, locates the importance of South Africa's challenges in the global context.   JAMES TAYLOR

Development as Freedom*
Amartya Sen
2000, Anchor Books: New York

The freedom-centred understanding of development expounded in this book has expanded my understanding of the concept of freedom. It has awakened me to how organisational cultures and practices can deprive people of their freedom. When power is embedded in hierarchy and control, individuals are often denied the opportunity to work with their own agency to shape the ongoing development of the organisation. Sen uses simple language to make accessible ideas pertaining to social justice, economic needs, democracy and the process of development.   NOMVULA DLAMINI

Just Another Emperor?
The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism*
Michael Edwards
2008, Demos Foundation

This is a beautiful, concise and persuasive piece of writing that examines how, with the current surge of new money into philanthropy, business principles are being insinuated into the organisation and practice of those seeking social transformation. Arguing both conceptually and empirically, Michael Edwards makes a strong case for caution. He shows how the very good that this phenomenon seeks can be undermined by its certainty (and unsuitability) of approach. He suggests a philosophical and practical alternative to the current ambitions of 'philanthrocapitalism', one that is altogether more modest and, potentially, far more effective. (This book can be downloaded from www.justanotheremperor.org")   SUE SOAL

Emergence – understanding complex living systems and emergence in nature*
Stephen Johnson
2001, Penguin Books: London

Emergence is a fascinating book which cites many examples of how living organisms, like ants and slime moulds, find order and practise a kind of self organising, shared and dispersed leadership. He tells how cities allowed to emerge naturally, actually take on a very organised shape. Johnson calls them complex adaptive systems and describes their characteristic "emergent behaviors". Through understanding emergence and leadership in nature, I was better able to understand them in social systems, such as organisations. DESIREE PAULSEN

The Enterprise of the Future*
Friederich Glasl
1997, Hawthorn Press: Stroud

Partnership has long been a buzz word in the development sector, but I'm not sure we fully understand the organising principles behind it yet.   Does Glasl's associative phase, added to Bernard Lievegoed's earlier work on organisational development (1969), offer us a glimpse of the kind of partnership we are looking for in answer to the global challenges we face? I found this book helpful and its exploration of leadership towards building associative phase organisation illuminating. RUBERT VAN BLERK

Pip Pip
A Sideways Look at Time*
Jay Griffiths
1999, Flamingo: London

This is a whacky, entertaining and radical treatise on time and culture. Pip Pip is an Alice-in-Wonderland journey through the real world of how we have chosen to measure, order and regulate our lives, and of how our natural sides have other needs and ideas about what works. The book

describes how modern, western 'progress' has been shaped by the enforcement of a suffocating, mechanical clock-time paradigm. I found it both fascinating and frightening how we have allowed ourselves to be ordered and standardised in the march of progress. The critique is strong, but so is the hopeful reminder of alternatives. A real mind-expander!   DOUG REELER

The Witch of Portobello
Paulo Coelho
2007, HarperCollins Publishers: New York

Weaving fiction with philosophy, Coelho creates a multi-layered story, which, in his eccentric but dignified manner, challenges us to find our own "vertex" or peak. I found the simple message underlying the protagonist's tumul-tuous story, told by the many who knew her, inspiring; with a free spirit and pure energy we can transform and master whatever it is we wish to practise. VUYELWA JACOBS

The Call
Discovering why you are here
Oriah
2004, HarperCollins Publishers: London

In this book, Oriah challenges the reader to "discover and live fully our true selves and our heart's desires".   She invites us to appreciate what we have, to free ourselves from society's dictates, to rid ourselves of the tendency to live in either the past or the future, and to be awake … because all we want and wish for, is simply here and now, around and within us.   This simply written yet deeply profound book makes me realise the importance of living in the now.   SHELLEY ARENDSE

The Thin Book of Naming Elephants
How to surface undiscussables for greater organizational success*
Sue Annis Hammond & Andrea Mayfield
2004, Thin Book Publishing Company: Bend

This readable and accessible book has many great attri-butes. By far the most instructive, is its account of how organisational practices that cut out creativity, inquiry and dissent, all in the name of efficiency, can literally cost lives. Anyone who is temped or compelled by the claims of managerialism should read this book.   SUE SOAL

Getting to Maybe
How the world is changed*
Frances Westley; Brenda Zimmerman
& Michael Quinn Patton
2007, Vintage: Toronto

This is a book about change in the really complex systems and processes that are every-day life and community. It is full of real stories and practical, inspirational guides to practice. The stories are of people who are really doing it, written by people who really understand it, for those who are really trying to do it. And 'it' is a new approach to and practice of social change, based on seeing life through the lens of complexity science.   JAMES TAYLOR

Co-operative Inquiry
Research into the Human Condition*
John Heron
1996, SAGE: London

I found a compelling and practical alternative to conventional research methods in John Heron's Co-operative Inquiry. This comprehensive book presents practical guidelines for those wishing to practise co-operative inquiry, a person-centred approach to research where all those involved are both subject and researcher. It also offers robust theoretical background, which pro-vides challenging motivation for engaging this method. But be warned, co-operative inquiry is not so much about new or different techniques and tools for action research, but about a change in orientation to knowing and to finding out. A recommended read for any new researcher or researcher needing renewal.   SANDRA HILL

A Simpler Way*
Margaret Wheatley & Myron Kellner-Rogers
1996, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc: San Francisco

This is a wonderful, simple, little book filled with inspiring poems and pictures. It shares how life organises, how self-organisation happens and describes the conditions that enable emergence – thus an excellent guide to working with and in organisations. I used it as an inspiring com-panion through CDRA's journey of internal evaluation. DESIREE PAULSEN

Sitting in the Fire*
Arnold Mindell
1995, Lao Tse Press: Portland

"We can blame crime, war, drugs, greed, poverty, capi-talism or the collective unconscious. The bottom line is that people cause our problems." This book is about facilitating process work in dealing with issues of diversity and conflict resolution. It "demonstrates that engaging in heated conflict instead of running away from it is one of the best ways to resolve the divisiveness that prevails at every level of society – in personal relationships, busi-ness and the world." (From Mindell's foreword to Sitting in the Fire pages 11 & 12]   BHEKI SKOTA

* Available for loan from the CDRA resource centre.

Detailed Expenditure Statement

for the year ended 29 February 2008

Community Development Resource Association (Association Incorporated in terms of Section 21) (Registration number 1987/004090/08)	Year ended 29 February 2008 R	Year ended 29 February 2007 R
OPERATING EXPENSES		
Advertising	(15,170)	(21,314)
Annual report	(95,284)	(104,302)
Associates and websites	(10,758)	–
Auditors remuneration	(110,376)	(126,614)
BVLF cost	(369,834)	–
Bad debts	(4,000)	2,000
Computer expenses	(24,098)	(17,589)
Consulting and professional fees	–	(569)
Delivery expenses	(32,517)	(43,384)
Depreciation, amortisation and impairments	(191,871)	(184,828)
Employee costs	(4,478,387)	(3,849,295)
Governance	(45,408)	(47,464)
Home week attendance	(7,650)	–
Incorporation costs	(30,479)	(8,968)
Insurance	(32,734)	(38,188)
Internal OD process	(100,868)	–
Legal expenses	(6,180)	(20,803)
Loss on asset	(19,476)	(308)
Networking local/overseas	(133,995)	(98,885)
Organisational cost	(933,906)	(822,558)
Outside consultant	(77,340)	(60,306)
Outside trainers	(5,000)	(35,949)
Petrol and oil	–	(8,000)
Postage	(6,296)	(6,534)
Printing and stationery	(61,241)	(40,090)
Promotions	(32,989)	(17,800)
Publications and productions	(37,351)	(16,342)
Repairs and maintenance	(54,935)	(33,368)
Research and development costs	(146,368)	(28,458)
Telephone and fax	(92,673)	(74,552)
Training	(7,591)	(15,707)
Travel – local	(16,181)	(36,621)
Outside consultant	(77,340)	(60,306)
	(7,398,458)	**(6,038,218)**
Funded as follows:		
EED (Evangelischer Entwicklungdienste E.V)	1,004,209	1,121,833
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	336,000	260,000
Bernard van Leer Foundation	472,864	169,458
Cordaid	851,852	670,194
Swedish International Development Cooperation	1,562,500	1,566,252
HIVOS	98,771	316,152
Department of Social Development	–	248,500
CDRA	2,872,262	1,685,829
	7,398,458	**6,038,218**

Community Development Resource Association – Centre for Developmental Practice

CDRA is an NGO offering a variety of services to not-for-profit initiatives around the world, particularly those concerned with development. Formed at the height of the anti-Apartheid struggle to support both welfare and development organisations, we have our roots in a progressive and humanist approach to social justice and change. We are in our 21st year of operation and, in this time, have worked with over 500 organisations. Our work includes organisation development consultancy and accompaniment; courses and the facilitation of peer-learning; convening of dialogue groups and an action-research and publishing programme that shares our learning and thinking more broadly.

CDRA

A CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

52/54 Francis Street. Woodstock 7925,

P.O. Box 221 Woodstock 7915 South Africa

Tel: (021) 462 3902 Fax: (021) 462 3918

E-mail: info@cdra.org.za Web: www.cdra.org.za