

Engaging with neglected first people

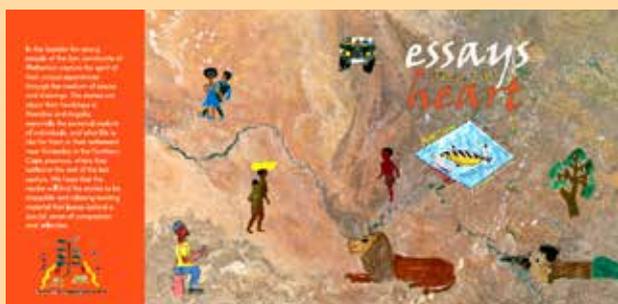
The San community of Southern Africa are the first people of the region but continue to be an oppressed and neglected part of the population. This, together with their history of oppression and genocide, has resulted in conflict and disputes that remain unresolved. It has also created poor living conditions such as extreme poverty and lack of education, and the belief that they will always be in this position.

With an emphasis on knowledge sharing to change this situation for the San Community of Platfontein, and to empower them to be self-sufficient,

the Institute for Dispute Resolution in Africa (IDRA), under the College of Law at Unisa, has embarked on the Platfontein San Community Site of Knowledge for Dispute Resolution project.

Led by senior researcher, Dr Dries Velthuisen, the project focuses on developing a localised understanding of knowledge on conflict and dispute resolution within the Platfontein San community. Situated about 10 km from Kimberley in the Northern Cape, this community consists of 7 000 members, of whom about 3 000 are adults.

The importance of this project for South Africa, says Velthuisen, is its relevance to the African way of doing. "What we are learning from the lived experiences of the San at Platfontein are many practices that can be used to create a new model for dispute resolution that is more applicable to the African context than current models, which are mostly from Western origins, and which do not work in our context. In the end, our project must inform policy, it must inform jurisprudence, so that the knowledge we gain is used to enrich current models of dispute resolution," he says, adding that this speaks to the project's societal and national development impact.



The Platfontein San Community Site of Knowledge for Dispute Resolution research project has produced a book, *Essays from the heart/Essays uit die hart* (published in English and Afrikaans). It consists of 10 essays and artwork from the young people of the Platfontein San. The book is available for purchase. Contact Jenny Jones (jonesj@unisa.ac.za) for further information.



Empowering through lifelong learning

The South African learning situation is fraught with gross disproportionalities between the learning context of the poor and the well-off. The higher and basic education systems are still reeling from years of instability and disequilibrium inherited from the apartheid era. Too few people enter the higher education system and even fewer are retained and eventually pass. Too many South African communities find themselves in the death grip of poverty, illness, unemployment and a general sense of hopelessness.

"Formal learning can, therefore, no longer be the only means of learning," says creator of Unisa's Chance 2 Advance programme, Dr Genevieve James. She says according to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, there are millions of adults and youth who are unemployed, poorly educated and not studying. Many do not qualify to enter a university or technical vocational education and training (TVET) college, and for those who participated in adult literacy programmes and attended public adult learning centres, there are no additional learning opportunities.

"In addition, educational opportunities for adults and post-school youth have been insufficient, and the quality has generally been poor. Public adult learning centres efforts are also inadequate and existing education institutions cannot meet the need. We are also aware that the expansion of the university and college systems will not be sufficient to meet all the needs."

It is against this backdrop that the C2A programme uses informal learning since it is fast becoming the most appropriate means to educate, uplift and enable communities to pursue life-long learning without the barriers of university entry requirements and costly fees. "Once communities re-discover the joys of learning, contribute to their learning development, and, co-determine their learning outcomes, then, there is a greater likelihood of completing basic education, securing entrance into the post-school education system, and greater civic participation," says James.

Pictured are those who participated in the C2A CPR workshop with Dr Sarasvathie Reddy in Phoenix, Durban.