



LEADERSHIP CASE

BULUNGULA INCUBATOR

For three years, Réjane Woodroffe lived a life of extreme opposites.

On a weekly basis, she undertook the 12-hour commute between Cape Town and an isolated community on South Africa's southeast coast. The worlds could not have been further apart. In Cape Town, there was a modern apartment, a car and a job in high-end finance. In her mud-brick home in the village, there was no running water, electricity or roads. Her neighbors and later

her colleagues were largely illiterate.

Réjane's growing understanding of the meaning of the contrast is ultimately what led to her full-time commitment to the work she now does: "My everyday life in the village is the same as my neighbor's, but I'm not poor. She is. Poverty is not about the absence of material possessions. It's about not having resources, not understanding the immune system, not knowing your rights. Poverty is about people not knowing or owning their choices."

Yet in this same poverty-ridden community, Réjane experienced a quality of social harmony that city living appears to have lost.

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Activism is in Réjane's blood—she is driven by a deep need to make a difference in the world. She attributes that in part to growing up during the apartheid era in South Africa, where she had felt its ugly effects at many levels. Classified as 'colored' or mixed-race, Réjane's family was forcibly moved from their home near Cape Town's center, on the slopes of Table Mountain, which the government of the day had arbitrarily zoned for white people to live in, to the distant Cape Flats, an area of broken families, hopelessness and drug-fueled gang violence. Notwithstanding the opportunities her career presented, she was never able really to leave activism behind.

When she met her husband, Dave Martin, Réjane was looking for the work her heart wanted, and he was committed to doing development work in a remote area. The Bulungula Lodge—a tourist business largely run by the villagers, and now a source of income for the Bulungula Incubator (BI)—was largely his project. Dave introduced Réjane to the area and the community which they now both call home.

ABOUT RÉJANE

An Africa Leadership Initiative-South Africa Fellow of the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

Former economist and asset manager for a **global wealth management firm.**

Co-founder and Director of the Bulungula Incubator. She **lives in the community** she serves, along with her husband, Dave, who is actively involved in the venture.

The 2014 Winner of the John P. McNulty Prize.

As she became embedded in the community, Réjane's sensible plan to build up a nest egg, and to defer full-time commitment until she was better prepared, was overtaken by a sense of urgency: "In the first two years we knew eight babies that died of diarrhea. We couldn't wait. We had to start something."

That "something," she and Dave initially thought, would be the rebuilding of the tumbled-down school. But in order to enjoy the benefit of it, the children—riddled with parasites and malnourished—would need to be on a better footing. Which meant health resources and parent education. It soon became clear that only a holistic intervention would be most effective. And so Bulungula Incubator was born.

“ WE COULDN'T WAIT. WE HAD TO START SOMETHING. ”

Many ventures fail because they don't understand the full extent of the challenges. For Réjane, the research phase, therefore, was all about understanding the territory. Was there someone else doing work similar to what she had in mind? What could she learn? What could and should she align herself to? What were the strengths of the community? What traditional development assumptions needed to be challenged?

She began to truly appreciate the power of the Aspen Global Leadership Network, and the fellowship of her Africa Leadership Initiative-South Africa class: "I had no idea how powerful and resourced the Fellowship is.

"For me, that is the research process: having every coffee, every conversation. The 80:20 principle applies—you'll get 80% of the help from 20% of the people—but you have to speak to all 100%."

The BI is established now, and the success measures are proliferating. Sustainability is at the heart of all her endeavors, so Réjane's leadership goal continues to be "to work myself out of a job."

ABOUT BULUNGULA INCUBATOR

- The Bulungula Incubator (BI) is a non-profit organization which "**incubates**" **development** in four communities.
- The BI seeks to address in **an integrated and systemic way** the challenges of rural poverty through infrastructure, health, education and entrepreneurship. At the same time, the BI promotes and **preserves positive traditional values and structures**.
- It thus acts as a catalyst, partnering with the community, the public sector and civil society to find sustainable solutions and synergies.
- The BI's **focus areas are education, health and nutrition, sustainable livelihoods** (micro-enterprise and agribusiness) **and basic services** (water and electricity).
- The venture is funded by corporations, foundations, government and individuals.

On the ground, this means a radical combination of respect for all aspects of humanity, and a conviction that competencies—while often hidden—can be nurtured into evidence. Every contribution is equally honored and valued: "When we do our work, it's important to preserve the positive aspects of this strong, cohesive, harmonious community, and the cultural traditions that make it such a wonderful place.

"We do that by working at depth through the community leadership structures," Rejane says. "It takes longer to make progress if you are taking the whole community with you. But that's what the work is. The community must have ownership in order to want to protect what they're building." It is central to Rejane's view of the world



HISTORICAL CONTEXT



- **Apartheid:** (literally meaning “apart-hood”) A system of racial segregation in South Africa enforced by white minority rule from 1948 to 1994.
- **Group Areas Act:** Law assigning racial groups to different locations.
- **Homeland:** A territory set aside for a designated ethnic group as part of the policy of apartheid for the purpose of creating ethnically homogeneous “autonomous” nation states.
- **Transkei:** One of South Africa’s four ‘homelands.’ Not internationally recognized, but declared to be an independent state by South Africa; little or no resources allocated to infrastructure and development.

that leadership and successful collaboration go hand in hand—she credits her husband, her team and the community with the multiple successes of the BI’s work, such as a graduation ceremony for the pre-primary schoolers organized and paid for by a community which previously had no reason to place any apparent value on education.

There are many operational challenges. For instance, when the pre-primary school was ready, the government agreed to fund certain ongoing operating costs but required expenses to be paid by check. Not one person from the village had ever seen a check. But banking is a must, and in line with Réjane’s philosophy of management, those responsible for the school—some of whom were themselves illiterate—would need to open the account and manage it. Therein lies an entire learning journey.

And there are many areas in which answers are not clear. “It’s all very well to talk about the rights of children,” says Réjane. “But what do you say when the elders then ask who is going to look after them in their old age?” In traditional communities, children seldom travel far or stay away long, and it is assumed that they will care for their parents as they age. Intervening in the system—helping to

equip children for success in a modern world, for instance—has consequences that need to be part of the discussion.

Réjane describes Bulungula Incubator’s work as “the most challenging thing I’ve ever done in my life. There are so many variables, there are so many things I don’t understand about the culture, about this work, about this place, about people, about what motivates people.”

When asked about her measures of success, Réjane could point to any number of statistics, like the fact that every household in the four villages covered by BI now has access to running water. Instead, she talks about one small girl, the daughter of an alcoholic father and a mentally disabled mother. Psychometric tests showed that the little girl was exceptionally bright, so the Bulungula Incubator got her into a scholarship program from Grade 1 at a school in the nearest town, Umtata. Now in Grade 5, the little girl is excelling in math, English and sports.

“When I see how quickly a life can change and how the life of her whole family can change, I wouldn’t need anything else to feel satisfied about my work,” says Réjane.

In these later stages of her venture, Réjane and her team are engaging more with how their work can be systematized and, leveraged—the intention, after all, is to enable government processes that others can then build on. It’s a reflective time: “There’s a lot of noise in terms of the emotional weight when you’re doing development work; and each of us has our own baggage and context. I have had to learn to take time out and just sit with the challenges; to clear my soul to see things clearly.

“You have to see the long term in the face of the immediate need,” says Réjane. “There are not enough years in my life to see this work done.”



THE CONTEXT OF POVERTY

The Transkei is desperately poor. When the Bulungula Incubator was established, there were no government services or functional schools. There was no access to healthcare, running water or electricity. The best job opportunity took the community's able-bodied men to hazardous mines over 1,000km (620 miles) away.

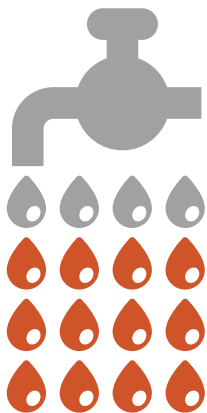
Life in the Transkei:



About 80% of people live below the poverty line.



Four out of five live in self-built mud-brick huts.



3/4

have no access to a toilet, or to clean drinking water.



10%

Most adults are illiterate, and only 10% have any high-school education.



72%

72% use firewood for cooking, a major health hazard, especially for children.

IN HER OWN WORDS: WHAT RÉJANE HAS LEARNED

Take it slowly.

"We often feel pressured to "do something" with quickly-realized results; but without a deep personal desire, it is hard to keep up momentum. Get to know the landscape. Talk to as many people as possible. Start small. Believe in your contribution. The momentum will come from that."

Be prepared to put your own money in.

"It's hard to find investors when there's nothing yet to show, and no immediate publicity."

Ask for help.

"In the early stages, hire someone to manage the administration required to establish the enterprise. As you proceed, don't stop seeking help. You're asking on others' behalf, and people open doors."

Give yourself a break.

"Every 5th year we take a year out. It's important for the organization, as it must operate without us. It's important for sustainability, as it means we must have systems in place that make full absence possible. And it's important for giving us headspace and recovery time."