Reflections from the Kgalagadi and SAVF Journey of Change

SAVF CEO – Adriaan Raubenheimer
**Photography: Petra Raubenheimer*

Dear Colleagues,

During December I took some time off and had the privilege of spending time in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. This gave me valuable space to reflect—on nature, on strategy, and on what SAVF embarked on and achieved during the past year.

The Kgalagadi lies deep within the Kalahari Desert. The journey there takes you past the red dunes on the edge of the desert, past landmarks such as Verneukpan—famous for land-speed records—and through the small but well-known town of Askham. The average annual rainfall in the Kgalagadi is approximately 250 mm. This year, however, the region experienced significantly higher rainfall. The result was extraordinary. The iconic red sand dunes were covered by a lush green carpet. Trees were filled with deep green leaves, and the entire Kgalagadi reflected abundance.

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It was as if the plants and animals anticipated what was coming and flourished. The usual small herds of springbok were replaced by herds of up to 300 animals.

We saw blue wildebeest in numbers of up to 60—an extremely rare sight in the Kgalagadi.

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At one waterhole we observed a convocation of 15 Tawny Eagles, and at the Polentswa waterhole a committee of 11 Secretary Birds.

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Over 14 days we saw 63 lions. In short, the exceptional rainfall led to an abundance of life in the region.

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We spent many hours at waterholes observing birds and animals. Watching closely this year, I realised that although nature is often perceived as calm and peaceful, it is in fact highly dynamic and intense. Like humans, animals need water to survive, and waterholes are buzzing with energy.

Birds arrive and depart constantly, spending only seconds drinking, always alert and nervous. Predators such as peregrine falcons hunt with remarkable precision—approaching like fighter aircraft in a coordinated dogfight. They are highly successful at waterholes.

Animals and birds drink with intense focus—one sip, then scanning the environment for danger. The same behavior is evident away from waterholes. Springbok and hartebeest form nurseries, with adults guarding the young while others graze. Even lion prides do not cross territorial boundaries without extreme vigilance.

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We witnessed what happens when male lions encounter cubs from another pride—sad to observe, but filled with strategic lessons.

What stood out clearly was that every species has a strategy, and they execute it relentlessly. Through this, they survive and grow. The moment focus is lost, nature takes over—and they perish. Survival in the Kgalagadi requires a deep understanding of both the internal and external environment. Only the fittest survive—but those who do, thrive. This year, that was clearly visible.

The strategic positioning I observed in the Kgalagadi reminded me strongly of SAVF.

SAVF began small, built on solid foundations, and over the past 121 years has grown into a formidable organisation. Some facilities that started modestly have developed into large and complex operations. Today, SAVF is a well-diversified organisation with multiple lines of business, serving a broad spectrum of clients.

SAVF's growth has been driven by strategy—continuously positioning itself in response to changes in both the internal and external environment, and adapting where needed.

Reflections on 2025

2025 was an exciting and rewarding year.
We continued our engagement with SAVF's Strategic Plan, ***The Journey of Change***, focused on becoming a **sustainable organisation**—independent of government subsidy—delivering **superior service** through **staff with an approachable attitude,** offering **value** at **family-friendly facilities.**

During 2025:

- We impacted the lives of **142,000** people through our various service offerings.
- We focused strongly on implementing SAVF's new Business Model and associated Game Plans to achieve:
    - o Growth
    - o Repositioning SAVF in the market
    - o Development of alternative sources of income

Growth

- We focused on the operational integration of SAVF Cosmos and Princess Home. I am pleased with the progress and results at both facilities.
- We are already in negotiations with another organisation that will become part of the SAVF family in 2026.

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Repositioning SAVF in the Market

- **You** repositioned your facilities by improving service delivery, staff attitude, and upgrading infrastructure—aligning with the expectations of the client of 2050.
- SAVF achieved a **net income of R14.8 million,** reflecting your strong alignment with organisational objectives.
- The acquisition of SAVF Princess Home and Cosmos increased our balance sheet by approximately **R150 million.**
- At Provincial Conferences, we celebrated your achievements.
- SAVF National Office is engaging with experts to define a comprehensive **Memory Care Model**, identified by NEB as a key future service.
- We engage with suppliers of state-of-the-art technology to enhance service delivery.
- We developed and launched the **Alignment of Actions with Objectives Programme**, providing managers with a practical toolkit to align employee KPAs with facility and organisational objectives. This final building block ensures that every person in SAVF understands how they contribute to our shared goals.
- We expanded our marketing footprint significantly—enhanced social media, web-based marketing, print, radio, and national television exposure. SAVF is now visible on national TV, firmly positioning the organisation in the hearts and minds of South Africans.
- We strengthened relationships with corporate partners.
- Every interaction with clients matters. Each one contributes to building and strengthening SAVF's reputation.

Development of Alternative Sources of Income

- In June, SAVF became the new developer of **Die Oog Retirement Estate** in Mookgophong—a sectional title development comprising 320 houses, 60 mid-care units, and a healthcare centre. The development was officially launched on 9 October.
- We received approval for our first S**ub-Acute Hospital** in Potchefstroom.
- The **Check-ID Police Clearance Initiative** was launched through our social work offices.
- The **SAVF Academy** platform will become operational in 2026.

Looking Ahead to 2026

If you think 2025 was busy—think again. The pipeline for 2026 is already bursting with exciting initiatives and projects.

- The **pace** of **change** and **expectations for excellence** will continue to escalate in 2026.

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We will remain aligned with our objectives to position SAVF as the organisation of choice in the markets we serve.

- We will continue focusing on growth, market repositioning, and development of alternative income streams to expedite the change needed to be the organisation of choice.
- Preparations for Congress 2026 are underway, where we will continue celebrating the New SAVF.

Thank You

Finally, I would like to thank every **volunteer and employee** for your tremendous **effort, commitment, passion**, and **resilience** during the past year. SAVF has again moved forward significantly on the Journey of Change and is not the same organisation it was a year ago.

Thank you for your selfless service to our most vulnerable clients, for your creativity, and for your unwavering dedication. I also extend sincere thanks to your families, who support you and enable you to do this important work. The organisation's results are a clear testimony to your collective effort.

For those who can, enjoy a well-deserved break.

I wish you and your families a joyful and restful holiday season.

Godspeed,
Adriaan Raubenheimer