

EMPOWERING AND EDUCATING COMMUNITIES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Internationally it is recognized that the success of any development project or service however needy, depends upon the community being involved, by taking ownership of all aspects from the start, for it to be supported, appreciated or even used. As David Korten, [Formerly Harvard, USAID and Ford Foundation] has emphasised "Real development cannot be purchased with foreign aid. Development depends on people's ability to gain control and use it effectively the real resources of their localities to meet their own needs."

In Africa rural dwellers make up the majority who, while scratching a living, still aspire to be urbanized -hence the continuing migration to cities, despite evidence that industry and manufacture no longer offer employment. Education and ODL are obvious solutions to bringing a transformation into those areas, but according to leading development agencies the foremost constraints are [a] the lack of appropriate institutions to facilitate the process and [b] the character, ethics and effectiveness of leadership

The following is an account of how a South African remote rural village of Kgautswane has met the PCF7 challenges of development and empowerment by transforming their community through the formation of a community-owned and managed Cooperative Institution that employed the following ODL imperatives

"Best practices and Case studies"

In 1992 Paul West, when Director of the Centre for Life Long Learning at Technikon Southern Africa commissioned the writing of an Integrated Community Building Programme' [ICBP] This was undertaken in cooperation initially with the urban township of Orange Farm under the leadership of Olga Lutu with three other communities. From there, this programme was taken to the village of Kgautswane situated 70 kms from the nearest town of Lydenburg. Virtually devoid of all essential services its community 'champion', Clara Masinga had formerly initiated the Kgautswane Community Development Center [KCDC] which had attracted the respect and sponsorship of many institutions and companies. In 1997 she became one of the 12 National Community Builders of the Year and in 2000 earned A Community Builder of the Decade. In December 2003 the South African State President awarded her the National Baobab Award "For outstanding contribution to community development, through the promotion of social reinvestment of skills, home-based care and economic self sufficiency".

Their Development Centre had its grand opening on the 8th May 1998 attended by Chief A.T. Kgoete, representatives of the Local Authority, leading figures in the community and more than 400 local people. During the years the following were established: an ICT centre plus a library, business and domestic job training, the establishment of a Tourist village with accommodation, and locally made arts and crafts. six centres for aged people and six for disabled, and with seventeen creches built with support from local Builders Association -all of which demonstrated their sense of initiative and collective responsibility. As a community member Eslina Mdluli proudly noted, "The community now realises that it can do some of the things without the help of government. They thought democracy will help them solve their problems, not to work hard, to get things easy. But now they are used to attending meetings and share ideas, so they started to think what they must do for themselves."

In the process they gained greater self-respect and self-confidence and discovered the secrets of both self-governance and self-reliance. Clara confirmed :*"We have done all these activities because we were taught to work integrated. The most important thing is that myself, Chief, Indunas and other traditional and political leaders in other villages work integrated, also with the Premier's Office."*

Indeed, the Premier of the Limpopo Province responded to this community with the Provincial government making \$1million available for roads, water reticulation, a clinic, sports amenities and school upgrading, all successfully undertaken by the community providing labour with financial monitoring and control by the Board of the KCDC

The World Bank Development Market Place [Washington D.C. February 2000]

The World Bank having become sensitive to criticisms of its strategies in Africa had responded to a need to make more direct contact with communities with the establishment of a Development Marketplace. This initiative began with a request to the 160 Bank branches world-wide to provide examples of innovative community projects.

1200 projects were received and 340 were initially accepted as potential prize winners.

The four South Africa submissions all gained Awards and monetary support.

- Village Banks for Leveraging Local Savings for local Development [Clara Masinga]
- A Healthy Start - with Natural Circle cultivation [Antony V. Trowbridge]
- Community Primary Health Care-givers [Olga Lutu]
- African Digital Library [Paul West]

“Design and management of systems”

The ICB Program was designed as an unfolding process of self-discovery from the realisation that the most valuable resources in any community reside in its Human resources [i.e. individual capabilities & skills] its Social resource [the many organizations, clubs, societies and professional associations that make up civil society.] -and even its own Financial resources -as demonstrated by those creatively active community organizations and their representatives who were led ::

To establish their own identity and build greater self-worth and self-confidence by:

- Uncovering their hidden strengths and abilities.
- Bringing people and organizations into a cooperative / symbiotic relationship.
- Establishing ethical values of mutual trust and respect.
- Extending the principles of democracy and citizenship.

To improve community management development by :

- Identifying legitimate leaders representative of community-based organisations
- Forming an acceptable Community Development Cooperative.

To improve levels of communication and information sharing by :

- Establishing a multi-purpose Cooperative Community Information Centre

To undertake their own reconstruction and development by :

- Implementing principles of Community Economics for greater self reliance.
- Establishing a Financial Services Cooperative {Micro-Bank}
- Coordinating and promoting their own development projects.
- Planning and implementing a community development strategy.
- Attaining greater self-reliance for the community

To generate wealth and job creation by providing and improving :

- Skills and quality of decision-making, planning and project management.
- Levels of cooperation, transparency and inter-personal relations.
- Standards of presentation of project and business plans for obtaining finance.

“Institutional capacity to manage and drive change”.

The provision of ODL is ultimately dependent upon the effective management and sustainability of its institutions. Through the ICBP program the community learned how to form their own ‘Council of Expertise’. Formerly, having been unrepresented and uncoordinated, but when brought together, a new degree of collaboration became possible as complimentary and mutually supportive sections in a Triune Cooperative structure comprising :

1. COMMUNITY INFORMATION COOPERATIVE [ICT] [Human Capital]

- which is a data-base of the indigenous and acquired skills of individuals.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COOPERATIVE [Social Capital]

- which is made up of the collective and co-operative efforts of such people

3. FINANCIAL SERVICES COOPERATIVE [Micro Bank] [Financial Capital :

- which is built up from personal savings and external investment

These ultimately depend upon sustaining the local **Environmental Capital** consisting of natural resources to be protected and utilised on a sustainable basis.

“Governance and stakeholder relations

The Cooperative ‘Council of Expertise’ represents the special needs of the following interest groups

1. AGRICULTURE
2. ARTS AND CRAFTS :
3. BUSINESS
4. EDUCATION :
5. FINANCE
6. HEALTH :
7. HOUSING:
8. MEDIA:
9. RELIGION :
10. SERVICES :
11. SPORTS:
12. TOURISM.

Building Social Capital

‘Council of Expertise’ Structure took the symbolic form of a ‘Wheel’ to represent all the many and varied local interest groups, organisations, associations, clubs, cultural groups and professional associations that serve the social, economic, cultural and spiritual needs of a community. These are acceptable community institutions because they are :

- ◆ Legitimate constituencies in their own right.
- ◆ Autonomous, self-motivated and flexible.
- ◆ Directly involved in, and dedicated to uplifting the community.
- ◆ Empowers women and engages the semi-literate
- ◆ Democratically responsible to their members and the community.
- ◆ Promoters of high standards of knowledge, skills, ethics and experience.
- ◆ A training ground for leadership.
- ◆ Offering continuity of leadership with whom investors and developers can negotiate

When these people came together to form a Community Development Cooperative, a different symbol and structure is required because it is not a power structure that has one person at the top of a pyramid. Nor is it a controlling umbrella body or a super pressure group, but a supportive structure that networks and shares information to facilitate and co-ordinate the process of development -whereby every member organization retains its own identity and autonomy, and can benefit from sharing and supporting each other for the greater good, in the true nature of the African culture of Ubuntu, expressed as : *“ I am because we are - and we are because I am.”*

To represent this culture, the people of Orange Farm chose the symbol of an orange with its segments representing the key interests and needs of their community with its leaders symbolic of the seeds of life and growth. This was subsequently changed to a wheel which has some special meanings, in that each spoke of the wheel represents a special functional interest of the community that radiate out to where the real action takes place -that is *“where the rim hits the road”*. A further attribute of this structure was to resolve the usual scramble for positions of authority in any community, by members both sharing in and even helping each other’ projects

The further aspect of this Institutional structure and the ICBP is its capacity to determine the effectiveness and quality of ODL by the participants collectively studying and discussing the ICBP module material at regular weekly meetings. Ultimately the success of the programme is determined by the attainment of practical outcomes, and that of participants through the principles of Self-assessment –not by external examiners.

“Adoption and use of technology for institution building”.

The ICB Programme was designed as an Open Distance Learning course of self-instruction in community building on the basis of *“Learning By Doing”* the following Modules –

- COMMUNITY AWARENESS,
- COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP,
- COMMUNITY ETHICS,
- COMMUNITY INFORMATION,
- COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE
- COMMUNITY ECONOMICS

Information strategy

The most important information a community needs is knowledge about itself -because any development has to begin with what people *do* know. The first objective of the community was therefore to gather information on its vast unknown and untapped resource -for in any community exists a vast unknown, untapped, and inaccessible amount of information about the skills and knowledge of its individuals and community-based organisations. Such information being the life-blood of any organization -. It tells us :

- How to find things.
- Who has got what.
- Where to get something.
- What to do with it.
- When something is happening.

For when someone says they want a house, a job or money, what they really need as a first step is *information* on how to get that house, that job or money. By establishing a database on a community's skills, knowledge and experience of its many organisations possess, the community attained greater confidence in itself and its own capacities, the better to know how to create local wealth-creating development and employment Instead of looking outwards for knowledge,

Impressed by their initiative and success, The World Bank made available \$50 000 to assist in the implementation of their computerized information centre [ICT] and with the TELISA project {Technology Enhanced Learning Initiative } to bring much needed training and commercial information to this rural area. At the opening of the Centre in October 1999, Mrs. Elaine Wolfensohn, wife of the President of The World Bank congratulated the community on their initiative and said that it was high time that we recognised the characteristics of rural leadership. She paid tribute to Clara for her vision and determination and how The World Bank was happy to have been able to support that vision. *"We see you as a model for other communities in the way that you have brought, the community, traditional leadership, government and NGOs together in co-operation and collaboration"*

The Stockholm Challenge 2000

The Kgautswane ICT Centre was one of the 12 projects selected out of 600 world-wide which gained The Stockholm Challenge 2000 Award. This award, is made to projects that are unique examples of how IT may be used in innovative ways to benefit people and society in terms of education, economic and social welfare, health and the promotion of democracy. This award has validated the contention that the first and most important need is for a community to establish own ownership and management of its own information, and not to have it imposed upon them by any public or private sector agency, however well motivated.

World Summit for Information Systems: Geneva 2003

Clara Masinga was invited to join the South African Minister of Communication Dr Ivy Matsepe Casaburri, to this event. After a few sentences of introduction of her formal address, she paid tribute to Clara and Kgautswane, closing with the following comments :*"President, Clara Masinga personifies not only resilience but also the depth and possibility for change that can result from the constructive use of ICTs that we have been talking about at this summit. There are many like Ms Masinga, who have put their hopes on this Summit and its outcome to do what would otherwise be inconceivable –jump several stages in the development process. This is why we believe this summit can and should leave an indelible mark.*

In conclusion, It is our view that from this historic Summit, Ms Clara Masinga can go back to her community with a message to her grandchildren that there is not only hope but also a certainty that they will be equal and active members of the Information Society. She can also tell them that their unique identity will add to the richness of this Information Society not only in form but also in content. I thank you"

"Finance models for institutions and development organisations."

'COMMUNITY ECONOMICS'

The ultimate challenge of educating a complete community in economic literacy is attained through the Module on Community Economics. For while there are few who can fully comprehend macro-economic issues, there are even less who understand or have forgotten how to apply the basic Objectives, Principles and Rules of sound Community Economics, whereby a community is able to generate its own development.

The Key Objectives of Community Economics :

- To work from the ground upwards with people at the 'Bottom of the Pyramid' [C.K. Prahalad]
- To retain or 'Take Back' ownership of local capital
- To educate the community about money and how it moves in the system.
- To activate local 'Dead Capital' [Hernando de Soto]
- To improve local enterprise opportunities for job and wealth creation
- To attain self-generated sustainable growth.
- To achieve greater *self-reliance*.

Key Principles of Community Economics :

1. The only way to obviate poverty is by creating wealth instead of just 'making money'
2. Building up a community's capital base -instead of exporting capital to metropolitan areas."
3. Although development aid can be demanded - investment has to be attracted.
4. Wealth is created by the circulation of money - instead of re-distributing it
5. Investing first where your best interests are - instead of where the best interest is.
6. Forget the National Growth Rate -what is your community's growth rate -economically, socially & culturally

The Kgautswane 'Village Micro-Bank'. December 11th 1999

The previous 'Village Banks' had taken many months to publicize and establish, but the Community economics module had prepared the community leaders with an understanding of the meaning, responsibility in handling money and the benefits of their having their own banking facility.

The Kgautswane village Micro-Bank, an essentially community-owned and managed institution, won the World Bank Development Market Place Award 2000 for 'Leveraging Local Savings for Development' for their having accumulated \$75 000 within two years from member's 'Life-savings' [80% being officially 'unemployed'.] This Capital Reserve Account provided collateral on which 1000 micro-loans were obtained from formal financial institutions - not by risking member's savings -as is the case with other micro-finance organisations.

In the years up to the 2008 financial crisis over 4000 people were made economically active by taking out and repaying loans. But when many city employees lost their jobs and returned to their village, the Micro-Bank members did indeed withdraw their capital intact to meet the urgent family needs. But this did not end the bank, merely reduced its capital, to be subsequently rebuilt.

"Future challenges for institutional development in a given region

The original ICB Program has been rewritten as 'Peace and Development Initiative' on the example of the Kgautswane community establishing a system local Cooperative Governance with the Council of Expertise being the means of combining the best of both Indigenous values and knowledge with contemporary and skills and technology. This model has been accepted by the Zulu King Zwelithini proclaiming "Our Vision is for KwaZulu-Natal to be to South Africa what California is the United States - an economy in its own right - not more just building houses - but creating New Rural Towns that are community-based with the renewal of appropriate Conservation Agriculture" Thereupon with the establishment of a Royal Development Company named 'Thwasa' €50 000 was raised to replicate the Peace and Development Initiative in an equally remote rural village of Mziki.

A 'Renaissance of Royalty'

King Josiah of the Korana has also accepted the Peace and Development Initiative as the basis for the design of a new 'Developmental Monarchy', having an ethical constitution with the Councils of Expertise as support structures for the traditional Councils of Elders -in recognition that an estimated 2.4 billion of the world's population owe their first allegiance to some form of traditional leadership -to be seen as a 'Renaissance of Royalty' in restoring respect for their status as both guardians and promoters of the development of their communities, and as a 'Gentle Revolution' with the overall objective of creating a renewal of rural life in and for Africa.

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