

Development projects key to poverty alleviation in rural areas



By [Abram Molelemane](#)

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Studies indicate that only 21% of people in South Africa living under the minimum levels are resident in densely settled areas, meaning that 79% of our poorest citizens are rurally based.



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In an effort to address these challenges, many developing countries have adopted strategies to give people in rural areas incentives to stay there and build a better life for themselves.

Organisations such as Indibano, Mvula Trust, the Local Economic Development Fund, the Rural Development Support Programme and Ncera Macadamia are doing great things in rural development. Many of these organisations have a special focus on civil society and community participation, integrated rural development, disaster management and skills training.

Most of the fast developing rural communities share a common thread - instead of just giving hand-outs, their support organisations have intensely invested in providing skills and development training in their respective communities. Many development initiatives follow this lead and have experienced positive results.

Equip communities

Sibongile Tabata, CEO of Indibano, an economic development implementation organisation based in East London, concurs with these self-help methodologies. In fact, her organisation's prime agenda is to equip impoverished communities to participate in the economic mainstream through commercialisation of their natural resource endowments, whilst making sure they acquire the necessary skills to enable them to create wealth and support themselves.

Indibano's collaborative effort with The Kula Investment Group, Phambili Vuma Investments and PricewaterhouseCoopers has initiated several projects that promise to have a lasting impact in the lives of many rural people in the Eastern Cape.

Their innovative use of a three-fold partnership between the community, corporate role-players and government is of great interest, and bodes well for rural solutions that require long-term commitment, entrepreneurial energy and meet a real market need.

Equipping community-based enterprises to develop, operate, compete and maintain a commercial business is an overarching challenge to poverty alleviation and economic growth in South Africa, says Tabata.

Opportunity for businesses

Catherine Wijnberg, who is a director of Indibano and founder of Fetola, an enterprise development consultancy, concurs with this statement. "Although difficult to set up, when professionally established and run, rural development initiatives provide an excellent opportunity for companies wishing to make a lasting economic difference, and build their brand amongst these communities."

The key question prior to starting any rural development project should be whether it is driven by demand or supply. If it is a demand-driven project, based on a well-known and accepted community need already articulated by those living in the community, it is much more likely to succeed once external funding ends. Often, supply-driven projects based on donor agendas or external perceived need, fail to capture the attention and commitment necessary from the receiving community, and thus fail quickly once external support ends.

Sense of ownership

Secondly, a strong sense of local ownership and genuine participation in project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation by both men and women are critical to successful implementation and sustainable benefits. This requires that the stakeholders meaningfully participate and play a core role in the programme identification and design process. "The ideas should come from the community, belong to the community, and be a part of the community, it should be locally driven," says Tabata.

Lastly, political support and support by the authorities or authorised bodies is critical for the sustainability of development projects. It is important to find the right level of support - local, regional, national or professional organisations. Programmes and projects which fit with partner government policies have much better prospects for sustainability, as they are more likely to have high-level political and institutional support both during implementation and beyond.

ABOUT ABRAM MOLELEMANE

Abram Molelemane is a journalism graduate at the Tshwane University of Technology. In 2011 he was nominated for the Record print journalist of the year award. He is currently employed as the media officer at Fetola.

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