

SIMBHADEME/INNOVATIONS PROGRAMME

A methodology for sustainable development of self-determined rural communities that directly improves rural livelihoods whilst maintaining ecological integrity.

PURPOSE

Holistic rural local economic development (LED):

- where local people are the major beneficiaries
- through the development of food security and livelihoods projects
- recognising that human and ecological well-being are inseparable
- embracing the 2nd (Inclusive) Economy
- facilitating the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA)
- working towards attainment of the Millenium Development Goals
- embracing the challenges of Climate Change mitigation and adaption
- assisting the municipalIntegrated development Plans (IDP).

PRINCIPLES

- Authentic – LED operates within the indigenous system of customary law, tribal structure, indigenous belief, customs, spirituality and language.
- Holistic – LED incorporates personal development, skills development, knowledge development, relationships, networking and mentoring into decent work creation driven at a grassroots level with no complicated imposition of structures and paper work.
- Flexible – LED is based in Traditional ways of being and doing. Setting goals and long-term planning do not belong to this system as things are allowed to change on a day-to-day basis according to the context.
- Complex – LED embraces learning that allows one to creatively understand things in a multi-dimensional manner. It seeks for knowledge to emerge from communities rather than having it imposed upon them.



- Local – LED is designed, driven and implemented using local social entrepreneurs and facilitators and incorporated into local municipalities, networks, organisations and projects.

PROCESS

What is recorded below are merely guidelines as each new IP community is different and the programme is designed entirely to local needs and situations.

Local design

The Simbhademe (pilot Innovations Programme) Team (those originally employed by the pilot and are now fully trained) make themselves available. Through personal introductions or current project personnel known to the newly identified area or social networks, social



entrepreneurs (local people with leadership potential) are identified and informal discussions around local experiences begin. Alternatively a community hears about Simbhademe through their networks and invites in further information about the programme to be presented to a group that they assemble. A Base-line Report is written as the benchmark for the programme evaluation process later. Regular discussions take place over a period of a

few months to identify the generative themes (the core issues) in the community. The Simbhademe Team also moves about the area listening to conversations in taxis, at taxi ranks, at gatherings and notes the conversation themes that emerge.

The Simbhademe Team then compiles a Generative Report and identifies individuals from the local community who will comprise the new Team for the new Innovations Programme.

A Kick-off Proposal is written up which utilises the local issues and knowledge in its formulation. This is discussed (along with the budget) with all local role-players and modified until there is complete buy-in and the Programme begins.

The Team who are formally employed by the Programme are as local as possible and are selected first. These people are paid by the Programme.

The Team then ensures selection of suitable people representing all stake-holder groups in the community for direct participation (maximum 30 people). These people are unpaid but all their transport and well-being costs are covered.

Thereafter a Reference Group comprised of Team, participants, non-participants from the community, non-participants from outside the community is selected. These people meet at least 4 times through the Programme, their costs are paid and they receive a per diem which is decided by the group. This ensures that there is some financial benefit beyond the Programme. Meanwhile a professional team are designing the workshop interventions according to the Generative Report, the negotiated Kick-off Proposal and expert input.

Phase 1 – Participative learning, verbally and pictorially based workshops

Workshop design and facilitation is based in adult learning theory and particular to the philosophy behind Training for Transformation with the exception that it is not gender or faith biased but emerges from the core beliefs of the locality.

The series of workshops intend to stimulate debate around sustainable development for rural areas, to identify local needs and aspirations and to develop this into a plan of action. All relevant development, environmental, economic and social issues are objectively discussed, with the communities ultimately being empowered to make their own decisions based on an holistic understanding of ecosystem services and their constitutional rights.



Phase 2 – Exchange visits

Small groups of participants are selected to travel to relevant community based projects or trainings for inter-community visits where the interaction is directly between peers (horizontal learning) and honest communication happens as there is no suspected agenda as when a 'consultant' is involved. Both successful and unsuccessful projects are sought to ensure that all types of learning take place. After each workshop or visit the participants feed back to their greater community and formulate questions and responses for future workshops and exchanges.

Phase 3 – Livelihoods micro-projects



These are established in each of the participating villages, are identified by the people themselves from direct community needs and advised by the learning from phases 1&2. The first 3 projects in each village are funded by grants and thereafter are loan based and can be either community regeneration or money generating projects.

Mentorship is ideally given to these projects by the Team for 3 years but this is dependent on funding.

Intended outcomes

Local design

- In creating their **own** programme for **themselves** people feel listened to. This creates an immediate feeling of:
 - improved self-esteem
 - improved self-confidence
 - improved self-worth
- In embracing local culture participants feel:
 - recognised
 - acknowledged
 - re-affirmed
- In focussing on local issues
 - programme sustainability is more likely
 - micro-project sustainability is more likely

Phase 1

- Improved environmental and development literacy; awareness of constitutional rights; deeper understanding of local issues; knowledge of the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment process; ability to participate in a Public Participation Process; ability to network with higher authority; bridging the gap between Traditional processes and Local Government processes.
- Deep learning as it is based on an experiential and participative approach that is verbally, pictorially and action based and situated within the amaPondo culture and accessible to all levels of literacy.
- Interaction between neighbouring communities who have not previously met.
- A community developed Environmental Management Plan based on Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) principles submitted to Local Government for approval, to assist with the IDP.
- Local organisations and local experts are networked into the communities.
- Immediate local financial benefit through the formal employment of local facilitators and coordinators, the payment of per diems for participants spending time away from their homes and fields, the use of locally owned transport, local caterers, local accommodation and local experts.

Phase 2

- Sound understanding of the issues at stake through inter-community communication.
- Deep learning through experiencing.

- Reinforced worth and mutual learning between communities.
- Financial benefit for the visited community.
- Relationships and networks developed.
- Sense of 'team' and 'community' reinforced.
- Improved problem solving ability and resolution of inter-personal issues.

Phase 3

- At least 3 new ecologically and socially sound micro-projects in each village.
- Decent work options.
- Improved food security.
- Money circulating within the community.

Overall Programme

- Social cohesion.
- Reinforced cultural pride.
- Local solutions to local problems.
- Local 'ownership' of the environment.
- Biodiversity security.
- Improved individual, family and community well-being.
- Self-determined local people
- More robust IDPs

Conclusion

The Innovations Programme is a methodology of raising the awareness of rural people so as to enable them to participate meaningfully in society on their own terms and contribute towards determining their own destinies. The overriding social condition challenging these communities is financial poverty whilst they are rich in other elements of their lives (including biodiversity richness). IP is specifically aimed at developing the capacity of the people concerned to affect policy decisions for their area, to become self-determined and become stewards of their environment culminating in the initiation of livelihoods micro-projects which will satisfy their financial, ecological and social needs.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- IP brings immediate and direct economic benefit to grassroots people
- Complete buy-in by the people as it is their programme from the outset.

- The micro-projects have not been supported either morally or financially from the 'outside' (by myself and SWC) for the last 18 months and they are still going and expanding.
- Strengthening of the Traditional System through reinstating that which has been lost but is still of value and consciously replacing that which is outmoded with a more useful modern practice.
- The people have the consciousness to actively choose what elements of their society they want to maintain, restore or dispense with in favour of Western ideas/technologies/values. This conscious choice means that there is no 'values vacuum' as when a cultural practice that holds a vital value system is undermined and eroded with no appropriate value replacing it.
- Restoration of communality as opposed to individuality which has been imposed as the 'correct' way to be by the West.
- Massive increase in self-esteem experienced and demonstrated through group expression which is the foundation of sustainability.
- The learning experienced by outsiders when exposed to the programme. This includes the 'experts' who are brought in to present at the workshops. They always leave with fuller hearts.
- Courage is shown in attempting to find a 'new' way to operate from the level of organisational development of SWC itself, through relationships with funders to exploring a way to do away with funding entirely and also taking the "we know best" attitude out of everything.

WEAKNESSES

- It is purely a rural development methodology and cannot be extrapolated into an urban poverty alleviation methodology. It only has potential where there is at least a remnant of an indigenous culture or belief system.
- The pilot is only now (5 years down the line) going beyond the establishment of micro-project in creating a social, business, ecological and governance plan for the area through various community mapping exercises which will be presented to local government in line with the Department of Provincial and Local Government white paper.
- The pilot has itself not yet been tested through replication of the programme elsewhere on the Wild Coast. Its success may just be a fluke!
- Once funding runs out the employment benefits run out although the micro-project benefits do not.
- It is impossible to maintain a 'funding flow' when so few personnel are dedicated to the programme and the organisation is run purely by volunteers.

THREATS

- Being a voluntary organisation SWC may not have sufficient capacity to oversee too large a programme
- Start-up of any new IP is dependant on funding and to get a funder who is still in a conventional funding paradigm to take a 'risk' on a programme of this nature that is unpredictable and that cannot be 'controlled' is very difficult.
- There is no further funding for the pilot to be able to take it one (or many more) step/s further. Proposals need to constantly be written and submitted.
- Not being able to access the area through lack of transport. The bakkie that we purchased with 'left-over' funding that was the solution to many of the challenges was written off in a freak accident.
- Community 'politics' – 2 or 3 local people are extremely threatened by the success of the pilot because with empowered people their personal power base and manipulative ability is being eroded.
- Owing to lack of funding none of the Programme Director's time is being spent in the area monitoring and mentoring which is essential.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Funders are now having international conferences and beginning to look at themselves critically. The opportunity exists to find funders who are open to 'experimentation' and to create a new type of partnership and mechanism.
- The programme is entirely in tune with Government's newly stated rural development policy which they are currently unsure how to implement. There are 5 pilots underway in different provinces. IP has been piloted. Replicating this methodology could be a huge time and money saver for Government. A South Africa wide roll-out is highly possible.
- The Department of Environmental Affairs has been appraised of the programme from inception and could become a working partner.
- Taking the pilot to its dream state a 220 sq km area of networked livelihoods projects; using a cooperative approach; governed by customary law; tied into the IDP; bound by an agreed plan of action; with a mechanism of local ownership, control and benefit (carrying ultimate responsibility); working within the 2nd economy and with local banking; that is connected to the 'outside' and the 1st economy for mutual benefit without being subservient to it; all operating within ecological parameters and contributing to the social fabric of health, education and family.