

The
National
Development
Agency

**Building
Communities**



BEYOND **10** yrs
OF UNLOCKING
POTENTIAL

Bringing it All Together

Foreword



The fundamental rights and certain socioeconomic rights of all South Africans are enshrined in the South African Constitution. Government is therefore obliged to take reasonable measures to ensure that all South Africans have access to services such as education, food, social security and healthcare.

Given the enormity of the challenges posed by poverty and

inequality, and the limited resources available to government – and informed by the South African civil society's history of political and development activism – civil society organisations have always been seen as a requisite development partner. The National Development Agency (NDA) was established to assist in strengthening the partnership between government and civil society through mobilising resources for civil society organisations, and through supporting efforts to strengthen them. This publication and the stories it contains bear fitting tribute to the work the Agency has done in pursuit of government's efforts to build a democratic society and to fight poverty. It also acknowledges the passion, energy and diligence that NDA staff members bring to their work, and they deserve to be commended for their commitment.

The NDA has distributed over R1-billion in grants since 2000, making it a key vehicle for social change as it funds organisations active in community development and social transformation. The NDA has funded organisations active in rural development, early childhood development and those seeking to build social cohesion, such as organisations actively working to reduce gender-based violence.

The NDA will need to harness the partnerships it has built over the last decade, and also seek to develop innovative ways in which it can mobilise and share resources for development action at grassroots level. I have no doubt that the NDA will overcome the challenges in its path and, in conjunction with the Department of Social Development, will continue to support the creativity and commitment of community and social organisations so that a vibrant development sector emerges that assists in building a South Africa that is free of poverty, inequality and discrimination.

Let's all join hands with one another and the NDA to work together towards a more prosperous South Africa!

Bathabile Olive Dlamini
Minister of Social Development



Tackling poverty is a wide-ranging and challenging undertaking. One has to understand the long-term implications of potential interventions on a community, whilst considering what the most effective action will be, in order to ensure relief in the shortest possible time.

These interventions invariably take place against the backdrop of stakeholder debates on

encouraging self-sufficiency and promoting sustainability. It also requires that those involved have a keen understanding of the capabilities a particular community may leverage to generate a sustainable livelihood. It is a complex task, and state agencies in this arena face a challenging and at times perplexing operating environment.

Since its formation, the National Development Agency (NDA) has been an important focal point for government and the Department of Social Development's poverty alleviation initiatives. It has proved adaptable too, initially having a close working relationship with Treasury and later joining this Department, where it has proved a valuable vehicle in addressing poverty.

This book bears testimony to the work it has done, yet simultaneously shifts the focus 'Beyond 10 Years' and gives us the opportunity to reflect on the important role the Agency has in 'unlocking potential' in the years ahead, specifically with regard to assisting the Department and government to formulate guidelines and policies that inform the grant-making process.

Its unquestionable expertise at bringing the resources from a variety of government departments to bear on poverty alleviation projects makes it the ideal candidate to advise on the deployment of resources. By virtue of its endeavours and the representation of civil society on its Board, it is also a respected agency amongst civil society organisations, allowing it to foster close working relationships for government with these important stakeholders. Equally important, it is a channel through which voices of concern in the developmental space can be heard.

In the years ahead, the NDA will become an important fulcrum in the developmental space, driving research, contributing to aligning our initiatives with the Millennium Development Goals, and ensuring that our development practices are sustainable.

Its experience can also assist our African counterparts as they find the balance between government and civil society. The future of the NDA is therefore filled with even more opportunities for it to play its role in alleviating poverty, thereby helping to build a caring society – together.

Vusi Madonsela
Director General, Department of Social Development

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Changing Need

Looking Beyond



The essence of social development lies in the provision of life and technical skills to those individuals who find themselves on the periphery of mainstream society. Correctly undertaken, this development affords them the opportunity to build sustainable livelihoods or secure meaningful employment.

Shifting moralities, a changing world economic order, rising

environmental concerns and rapid urbanisation are but some of the factors that influence the developmental space and make it a highly dynamic environment. Charting a course in this environment requires considerable wherewithal in order to anticipate where interventions must be exercised to secure maximum benefit.

Over the years, the National Development Agency (NDA) has proven adept at making the right calls, and many beneficiaries can attest to the impact the Agency has made to their lives, families and communities. Perhaps most importantly, the NDA has brought hope to the poor and indigent where none had previously existed.

Despite the Agency's efforts, much remains to be done in our social development space, and the refinement of poverty-alleviation mechanisms and institutions will be critical to future success. In this regard, the NDA has an important role to play.

The development of metrics, which provide for the meaningful measurement of the unique value of social development; systems that allow for the scalability of interventions; and constructive input into the formation of strategy and policy are all critical contributions the Agency will need to make.

Without this, the discourse needed to ensure that effective development practices are identified will never be adequately stimulated, and poverty alleviation will never assume its rightful place on our national agenda.

The NDA has, as you will see on the following pages, achieved much and, through its past experience, is ideally equipped to deliver on our future challenges, thereby opening up new frontiers for our nation in the social development realm.

Chairman
Malose Kekana



Since its formation, the National Development Agency (NDA) has held firm in the pursuit of its vision: developing a society free from poverty. This is unquestionably a huge undertaking, particularly in the light of our country's social and political history.

By its very nature, poverty is a multidimensional state that affects the individuals burdened

by it on many levels. It therefore requires multipronged interventions that culminate in sustainable independence.

What it also requires is a resourceful, passionate and committed group of people who are tenacious in their pursuit of poverty eradication. Individuals with these attributes exist in large numbers within the NDA, and it is thanks to their determination that the Agency has been able to pursue and deliver on its mandate.

At best, the articles in this book provide a brief snapshot of our history and projects we have been involved in. More importantly, the stories reflect that time and space are just as critical in successful interventions as money and physical assets.

We also take the opportunity to highlight our strategic focus areas for the next five years: early childhood development (ECD), capacity building, food security and income generation.

The long-term significance of ECD and the positive impact it has on physical and cognitive development is well documented. In order to maximise the potential of ECD, government will focus on resourcing infrastructure, curriculum development, and ensuring compliance with norms and standards at ECD sites.

We will underpin this through interventions that support food security at ECD sites; work towards strengthening the institutional, leadership and management capacity; and improve the infrastructure of ECD sites.

We have already made a start in all of these areas, and some of the articles presented to readers reflect the type of engagement and outcomes we intend to achieve in this space.

The United Nations defines food security as "all people at all times having both physical and economic access to the basic food they need". We support this definition of food security, and it should be noted that South Africa is considered food secure at a national level, with 10.6% and 12.2% of adults and children respectively being sometimes or always hungry.

However, at the NDA we are cognisant of the fact that the struggle to ensure continuity in our nation's food supply is an ongoing one. There are a myriad of factors that influence food

security; changing weather patterns, labour mobility and fluctuating commodity prices are but some of the factors in this arena. They often combine to impact the agricultural sector in unique ways that lead to increased input costs and shrinking profit margins, which can place our national food security in jeopardy.

In light of the above, rural communities are often ideally placed to make the most of the natural resources available. Unfortunately, they are not always able to action this because of a lack of investment in rural areas that hampers production inputs.

In this respect, we will be focusing on funding community-based agricultural projects, resource-sharing with other organisations, capacity development, research and overall advocacy work. We view this as a critical undertaking, since food security in South Africa is intrinsically linked to rural development and land reform.

Our focus on income generation is intrinsically linked to one of government's priority areas – the creation of decent work. Despite significant efforts on the part of government to create work opportunities, unemployment has remained high, and we have prioritised the creation of work as an important area.

Women and young people will specifically be targeted for skills acquisition in this regard, with the view to them managing various trades and economic opportunities in a sustainable manner.

We will also be re-energising our long-standing commitment to capacity building. Civil society organisations play an enormous role in community-building and cohesion. A great deal of what we have achieved over the years has been in conjunction with these organisations, and readers will note this as they consider the various projects in this book.

The grassroots capabilities that these organisations have, and their ability to ensure that communities coalesce around the common goals of skills and sustainable development, are unparalleled. We will be launching multiyear capacity-building programmes that will strengthen their capabilities, which we believe will place the majority of them on the path to self-reliance.

We will also be working with nongovernmental organisation networks, with the view to helping them align their activities with government's stated policy objectives, and to create a platform for policy dialogue with government on poverty eradication.

Expanding our resource base by mobilising our own funding drives will be critical. Government has many pressing expenditure objectives, and we need to secure future resources if we wish to deliver on our strategic objectives.

In order to facilitate our funding drive, we will establish a dedicated resource mobilisation unit that will build relationships aimed at enlarging our resource pool and building our financial base.



Sharing what we have learnt will feature prominently in our future, and a project management unit is being established with the specific mandate to provide project management services to government, the private sector and donors.

We have capacity to allocate to this unit, and our track record with civil society, various spheres of government and project management methodologies potentially makes this a powerful vehicle that can be used to tackle poverty alleviation.

Ultimately, our responsibility is to individuals who need to believe that they have a future and that they have not been condemned to a life of suffering. Knowing that, despite all our efforts, there are still individuals shackled by poverty is the catalyst for all we do and will drive the NDA in the pursuit of its mandate in the years beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "V. Nhlapo".

Chief Executive Officer
Dr Vuyelwa Nhlapo

Let's Make Poverty History

The mid-1990s were a time of great excitement in South Africa. The long and hard battle for liberation had been won, and the moment had arrived to make a fresh start. The damage had been deep and broad, but there had been a great deal of work on planning for the future. The Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) had been conceived, consulted about and drafted, and it was awaiting implementation. The world was impressed with South Africa and was our ally. Donors and international agencies came to the fore with generous offers.

By this time, there were a plethora of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) that had worked towards policy creation for the democratic era, and that had laid the basis for much-needed development programmes in the country. Many comrades went from NGOs, the unions and other civil society organisations (CSOs) into government. It was recognised that it was essential to retain the learning, skills and technical resources of the NGO sector, and that they should work alongside government's development programmes.

Given that the new government was in the early stages of establishing itself, it was essential to ensure the survival of the NGO sector. Thus, the National Development Agency (NDA) was conceived to provide grants and to be a statutory institution developing policy through research, thereby supporting civil society in poverty alleviation and the advancement of democracy in South Africa.

To tell the story of the NDA, we need to consider its evolution, which took place in several stages.

- ▶ The first stage recalls the establishment of the NDA, which was undertaken by the Presidency and which led to the promulgation of the National Development Agency Act (No. 108 of 1998) and the appointment of the first Board in 1999.
- ▶ The second stage saw the beginnings of the pain of inexperience in the first three years. These were caused by the management challenges of processing the avalanche of proposals received and the demands for grants from CBOs and NGOs.
- ▶ The lights got even dimmer in the organisation during its third stage. Senior management were suspended and yet

A Difficult Birth

Delani Mthembu was the first Chairperson of the National Development Agency (NDA) and was responsible for giving life to its establishment in terms of the National Development Agency Act (Act No. 108 of 1998).

"At that time, the Transitional National Development Trust was the interim vehicle for dealing with applications for funds aimed at poverty alleviation projects," says Mthembu. "It was difficult wrapping up the Trust and starting the new agency because the process quickly became politicised, and people were critical of the NDA before it even got off the ground."

From the very beginning, the NDA had to work hard to ensure that the question of poverty alleviation remained a top priority on the national agenda. "We never disputed the fact that government had many priorities to attend to, but we felt then, as I still do today, that poverty alleviation should be our nation's number one priority."

Finding a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) with the right blend of development experience and a passion for social entrepreneurship also proved difficult, and Mthembu soon found himself thrust into this role. "It certainly wasn't ideal, but I realised that the most important thing was to get the Agency functioning as effectively as possible. Poverty-stricken people needed our help, and to me that was more important than anything else."



there was a determined core that soldiered on, albeit with a limited focus.

- ▶ The last few years have seen a renewed energy. This fourth stage has seen a vital set of achievements under complex circumstances in an organisation that was unhealthy for an extended period.

In working our way through the story, a few ideas coloured our lens. The consideration of poverty in South Africa is inseparable from the legacy of a history that stripped and denied the majority of South Africans of their rights.

Among other things, apartheid took away people's land, their right to education, the right to enter the professions they desired, their right to live where they chose, and the right of families to live together. The homeland system was probably the most pernicious of the Acts of apartheid, where black South Africans were forcefully removed to 'homelands' designated to their tribal group.

Although most of these 'homelands' were not economically viable, people were forced to remain there while some members of their households earned meagre livings in urban areas. Given the magnitude of the damage of such a history, the majority of South Africans are still faced with deprivation at the level of skills, housing, land rights, the means to acquire these and, most importantly, the resources needed to make a livelihood.

Eradicating poverty and its causes thus implies not only that all these rights have to be restored, but also that people must be compensated and placed on pathways to sustainable livelihoods.

The work of the NDA, therefore, is to tackle both the causes and effects of poverty. It is realistic, however, to ask how far a single national agency such as the NDA can go towards meeting such a vast and complex challenge as "contributing towards the eradication of poverty and its causes". Clearly, the task of this agency is intricate and complex.

Planning Begins

There was little delay in government and NGOs cooperating towards the establishment of the NDA. From the detailed perspective provided in three volumes of documentation of the NDA establishment processes, the priority of the time was the management of grant-making and institutional design to support civil society efforts to eradicate poverty.

The Transitional National Development Trust (TNDT) was established to support civil society. In 1995, the first commitment of R50-million was made by government towards the establishment of the TNDT, and this was matched by a further R75-million by the European Union (EU).

The TNDT's mandate was defined as the financing of CSOs while government investigated a long-term solution to partnering with CSOs to alleviate poverty and advance the RDP. Thus, an Advisory Committee was appointed in the last



Higher Calling

"The ideal would be for the National Development Agency (NDA) to be a Schedule 3 institution, like the Public Protector, Auditor-General and Independent Electoral Commission. As it stands, forming part of the Department of Social Development makes it difficult for the Agency to reach its full potential," observes Griffith Zabala.

"I am not taking anything away from the Department – the reality is that the NDA has achieved while under its stewardship – but I think that more could have been achieved had the NDA reported directly to Parliament through the Office of the Deputy President."

Zabala was initially involved with the NDA as part of the Advisory Committee to the erstwhile Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, on the establishment of the NDA. He supported the Secretariat in the Deputy President's Office in writing and submitting the report to Parliament on the establishment of the NDA.

"Advocacy, the development of partnerships between community-based organisations and government departments, promoting and contributing towards a sound development paradigm, and the research and publication of sound and best practice development case studies have all been missed by the NDA. It has most certainly not happened because of a lack of interest or willingness to work. Rather, it has occurred because of severe budget limitations, and unless this is remedied this unfortunate situation will prevail."

quarter of 1996 to advise the Deputy President on institutional arrangements between government and civil society.

The Committee recommended, among other things, that a new institution dedicated to grant-making be established. It was recommended that sufficient lead-time should be given and that all systems had to be in place before the new institution opened its doors to the public in 1999. Based on the framework of ideas and principles in the report submitted by the Advisory Committee, the legal team produced the draft NDA Bill. Following on this, the NDA Act was promulgated in November 1998.

The originally designed organisational structure for the NDA was that there would be a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) appointed by the Board, with Programme Directors for grant-making, research, the resource centre and communications. Each province was to have a Project Director (who reports to the National Director of Grant-Making) and Project Officers. This basic structure is still in place. This structure was motivated by four principles:

- ▶ Accessibility to the most marginalised communities.
- ▶ Elimination of unnecessary hierarchy.
- ▶ Accountability.
- ▶ Appropriately devolved authority and responsibility.

In the planning process, the level of finance required for the establishment of the NDA was reviewed, and grant funding of R95-million, R165-million and R263-million respectively for the first three years was recommended. Further funding to complement government funding was sourced, and grant funding was negotiated from the EU to the value of R50-million for the financial year 1998/1999. A due diligence exercise was also conducted on the Independent Development Trust (IDT), which revealed that it had R700-million in uncommitted funds. A recommendation was made that a portion of this be used to fund the NDA.

Moving into the Millennium: 2000-2003

“The early years were tough, yet focused and fulfilling,” says Sylvia Mlangeni, a Project Administrator at the NDA. Mlangeni is one of the few staff members who has institutional memory dating back to the days of the TNDT. There was enormous enthusiasm and generous resources from government, and the NDA received R338-million from government and the EU.

The staff and Board set about working diligently to deliver to the organisations by doing the work in the field. Mlangeni recalls how they would sometimes work “till all hours” to process proposals and grants.

In its first year, the Agency approved 547 projects worth R127 726 625. The disbursement was guided by the Statistics South Africa Poverty Report, which provided information on poverty pockets that were the prime targets. Of course, the first year also brought on many challenges, as the transition from the

A Focused Contribution

The Co-operative for Research and Education (CORE) was established in April 1990 in the belief that, by sharing knowledge and information, democracy in South Africa would be strengthened. It has a long working history with the National Development Agency (NDA) and Director Piroshaw Camay points out that the NDA is an ongoing intervention.

“Key to its current and future success will be for it to revisit its vision to ensure that it remains true to this. The NDA has an important role to play in the development landscape and is a key link between government and civil society organisations.”

He points out that coherent policy making is one of the biggest challenges that civil society organisations face, and that the NDA can be an important vehicle that facilitates clarity in this environment.

“It can also help drive our nation towards the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals, but in order for it to make an impact in this regard it needs to remain focused on its vision.”



TNDT to the NDA had to be managed; new approaches, systems, procedures and policies had to be developed; and staff, donor agencies and civil society anxiety had to be managed – and all while sociopolitical pressures and high expectations prevailed among stakeholders.

These strategic challenges were also accompanied by management challenges. Staff had to deal with an assessment backlog of over 4 000 projects while receiving approximately 50 applications per week. This meant that each Project Officer had to carry a portfolio of 200 projects. As in the establishment phase, the emphasis was on the delivery of grants.

The solid resource base of the NDA continued into the second year, 2001/2002. The Agency had R221.1-million in funds available to commit to projects, of which R109-million was the balance from the previous year, R92.6-million was received in the current year, and R19.5-million was from the IDT. The total funding allocated to projects was R160.1-million, leaving R60-million unallocated. The grant from the IDT of R100-million continued to be invested as capital.

While the NDA set about forging stronger relationships and partnerships with the relevant ministries and government departments, public entities, private-sector corporations and development-sector agencies, the realities of the workload started to put strain on the NDA's capacity in its second year.

The amount of funds disbursed declined due to operational blockages, preventing fund flow. There were a range of complexities to deal with, and sufficient attention did not seem to be given to creating internal capacity and gearing the organisation to deliver.

The formation processes of the NDA were completed in the third year of its operations. The Agency's linkages with the Department of Social Development (DSD) were formally concluded with the amendment to the Act, and an operational team consisting of DSD and NDA staff was established. NDA offices were established in all nine provinces to decentralise activities and begin the process of being closer to where the needs existed.

The first three years of operation showed that there was great enthusiasm among donors to partner with government agencies in the country. While the extensive planning prior to 2000 should have prepared the Agency, it underestimated the extent of needs on the ground. The fact that, by the year 2003, 21 000 proposals had been received and only 7 000 processed, illustrates the magnitude of the demand and supply for the funds of the NDA.

Notwithstanding these challenges and the change in leadership, a total of 1 822 projects in all nine provinces were supported in the 2000-2003 period. While enormous efforts were made to meet demand, the priority was coping with managing the situation. Strategically, little attention was paid to measuring the impact on poverty, research and policy dialogue.



Research Potential

"The National Development Agency (NDA) has an important role to play in community development by unleashing the human potential and the assets that lie in those communities," maintains Dr Lulama Makhubela, who served as Director: Research and Development from 2003 to 2006. She is of the firm belief that the Agency can make a significant contribution to poverty-reduction strategies and policies through a clearly defined research agenda.

"The value of a proactive approach to research that is informed by the national development research agenda will assist the NDA in carving its own niche within the broader developmental imperatives that focus on addressing poverty at a family unit level."

She points out that the magnitude of poverty in this country is often downplayed as it goes right down to the level of family life. Trying to address this challenge at institutional level, by supporting or giving guidance to civil society organisations (CSOs) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), is an important role that the NDA is fulfilling.

"However, in any situation where meagre resources need to be spread thinly, the impact of the interventions and support provided will be minimal and at times labelled as ineffective. The twin mandate of the NDA was forever at the centre of discontent by both CSOs and NGOs. However, one still argues that even if the NDA were to focus on the provision of support and guidance only, it cannot do so without adequate funding."



Delivery through Dark Days: 2003-2005

October 2003 to June 2005 was a difficult period for the NDA. A new CEO was functional in the position until late October 2003. His suspension was followed by the suspension of the Chief Operating Officer (COO), leaving a substantial leadership vacuum.

To support the continuation of functions within the Agency, the DSD seconded two officials to senior positions in the NDA. They were the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief of Staff at the DSD respectively, and they had to continue their work at the DSD while 'holding the fort' at the NDA. By all accounts, both showed outstanding commitment to ensuring stability in the NDA despite their heavy load. Their leadership was focused on the continuity of the Agency's work.

Nonetheless, the NDA committed grant funding of nearly R105-million and disbursed R133.5-million during the year. Funds were granted to more than 100 new projects, and more than 650 projects continued to receive funding. These included projects in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. Efforts to develop partnerships were also showing good results.

Although the work of the NDA continued in essence, the mood and morale of the Agency had clearly been challenged by the suspension of senior officials and internal strife, and there was a long list of challenges. The fact that R133.5-million was disbursed, a new approach to clustering projects was adopted, and a commitment made to a four-month turn-around time for processing applications during the year, was quite outstanding given the tide of events that surrounded staff and leadership.

The year that followed saw the new beginning that was so badly needed by the NDA. A new CEO, Godfrey Mokate, was appointed in mid-2005. More than R92.63-million was committed and R62.71-million was disbursed in the 2004-2005 period. The NDA successfully funded 72 projects totalling R62-million through the EU Programme for Reconstruction and Development.

These programmes enhanced the livelihood security and self-reliance of poor households by creating economic development opportunities, improving income, promoting food security, and strengthening the government-led land reform process by supporting post-settlement community building and initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable development. Some new project areas were introduced, and land restitution, bee farming and poultry projects situated in several provinces were funded.

An impact assessment conducted during the 2004/2005 period showed a sound emergence from the malaise that had beset the NDA. However, although the Agency was rated highly for its capacity to transfer funds to civil society, its role in capacity building, research and policy dialogue was not rated highly. In fact, at the time there was little evidence to

Pivotal Role

"Had it not been for the National Development Agency (NDA), many nongovernmental organisations and community-based organisations involved in poverty alleviation initiatives would have folded, and the poor would have had to suffer the consequences," says Advocate Rams Ramashia.

South Africa's newly elected democratic government faced the challenge of ensuring that donor funds that were previously used in the fight against apartheid would be rechannelled into the developmental space. The NDA played an important role in this regard, and its first preoccupation was to provide a lifeline for civil society formations that were struggling in the new funding space.

"The NDA's major strength is that it has a sustainable source of funding while being independent of funders. In this context, it can decide on its direction based on the needs of the country, rather than other imperatives that do not always coincide with grassroots needs. Secondly, the NDA is unique in many ways in that it has the three best elements to tackle its tasks: government support, donor perspective as well as nongovernmental organisation operational protocols," avers Ramashia. "It also has more than a decade of experience in doing something no one has done before, and as such I believe that there are many lessons learned in the delivery of its programmes."



support the notion that the NDA had the capacity to play a meaningful role in research and policy development. By March 2004, the NDA had no systems to capture its lessons, nor was there any form of knowledge management to feed into other national systems.

The NDA's delivery on its mandate after its first five years was therefore only partial, and its effects on the causes of poverty could not be discerned due to the incompleteness of its monitoring systems.

Revival and Reinvention: 2005-2007

The period beginning in 2005 heralded a new beginning for the NDA. The Agency's organisational culture up to the middle of 2005 had been operationally focused on meeting the needs of the first mandate of funding CSOs.

There had been little attention to management, strategy or measurement issues. There was a healthy staff complement in terms of numbers, namely 130 people. However, there was heavy emphasis on grant administration and disbursement, and very little attention was being paid to monitoring and evaluating the impact of the grants.

This had consequences for the measurement of output and the outcomes of the NDA's investments in communities, and for national learning about poverty-reduction strategies.

The key task was to institute a strategy that would go beyond disbursing grants. It was also essential to pay attention to other key strategic functions such as research, capacity building and dialogue.

Perhaps the most important area was the lack of systems, procedures, policies and controls. The focus on improving systems required an integrated information technology (IT), performance and information management system. The new system called for linkages across finance, programme monitoring and internal management processes.

By early 2006 the key transformation functions had been completed. There were new systems for record management and performance management, as well as a clean-up of the policies regarding procurement and human resources. For the first time in its existence, the NDA was given a clean audit by the Auditor-General's Office for the 2006/2007 financial year.

Beginning in 2005, a strategy was put in place and was revised annually. Up to this point, although the NDA's mandate (as clearly stipulated in the NDA Act) was grant-making, capacity building, policy dialogue and research, achieving a balance across these different areas had evaded the Agency.

Due to pressure from the external environment and lobbying from civil society, disbursement was the major activity.

However, in order for development programmes to be able to generate measurable and replicable impact, there is a need for well-skilled organisations working with people where they are located in the country.



Committed to Fighting Poverty

"The idea of the National Development Agency (NDA) was born out of the quest for transparency and commitment to the plight of the poor sectors of society, and to help government deliver in uplifting the living standards of its poverty-stricken people," says Professor Rose September, a former Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Agency.

She points out that means had to be devised to heal and assuage the imbalances of the past, and to empower people on the basis of an equitable distribution of resources. The best way this could be done was by strengthening the institutional capacity of civil society organisations for long-term sustainability.

"This mandate was entrusted to the NDA," she notes. "Therefore, the critical objective of the NDA is to disburse and focus funds in poverty-stricken areas, while at the same time developing and implementing a capacity-building model aimed at improving the competency of civil society organisations.

"The NDA has always aimed at becoming highly responsive and proactive to the development needs of poor communities. Building the leadership, technical expertise and management capabilities necessary to deliver on the NDA's poverty alleviation mandate is an ongoing challenge."



The reality is that organisations such as the NDA have great difficulty receiving well-conceived proposals for funding.

Although the Agency has a more proactive approach than a number of other organisations in the country, the attempt to generate good proposals and be administratively efficient places a heavy responsibility on the Development Officers at provincial level. Clearly, a refocusing in strategy was called for.

The need for integration of capacity building into the Development Management Directorate was realised and executed in 2004. The fact that capacity building was housed in research seemed logical, but it did not incorporate a seamless process of grant-making and capacity support. However, once capacity building was moved into the Development Management Directorate, the need was highlighted and, since 2005, the NDA has made its largest investment in capacity of R25.7-million.

This was a substantial initial investment, and by the end of the 2000-2007 period the NDA had disbursed R640-million to poor communities for food security, sustainable livelihoods and community health projects. Over R404 773 000 went directly to households, and 2 031 375 people benefited from these projects.

Worth noting is that the second Board of the NDA was appointed in 2003 and its term has thus spanned a highly challenging period of the Agency's existence. The Board has been one of the constants through the turbulent years of the NDA, and its members have attempted to maintain focus on delivery and sound governance.

The Board was appraised in mid-2007 and the overall view of Board performance was that there has been outstanding commitment from its members. However, given the organisational challenges, members had to focus on operational matters rather than paying attention to strategy.

Both the Board appraisal and a governance assessment found that risk management in the organisation had not been given sufficient attention.

Finding its Stride: 2007-2011

The year 2007 saw the NDA make a significant recovery, building solid and strategic platforms to evolve further towards achievements in its complex mandate.

The Agency had set itself four strategic goals, namely organisational transformation, partnering for development, community empowerment for sustainable development, and the communication of all relevant researched development information. The NDA had 12 objectives related to these strategic goals, and made enormous progress towards achieving them.

The main thrust of its plan was to conclude the process of restructuring the organisation, which was started in the previous years, by focusing on building the internal capacity of the organisation.

From Foundation to Apex

As Provincial Manager for the National Development Agency (NDA) in the Limpopo Province, Professor MZ Chuenyane sees first-hand the impact that the Agency is making in this area of the country. "My primary role is to facilitate a meeting of minds between potential beneficiaries and the NDA, and then to supervise the beneficiaries' projects once they receive funding," he explains.

When it comes to beneficiaries, the Professor interacts with local communities and municipalities to determine which projects would benefit most from NDA funding, and which are in line with development areas prioritised by government. Once the projects have been identified, beneficiaries are assisted in terms of applying for funding and responding to Requests for Proposals.

"We also help people who approach us directly or who are referred to us by municipalities, but the truth is that the NDA is one of the best-kept secrets in the province," he says with a sad smile. "We can only help so many people given the funding available to us, so we have no choice but to evaluate projects and then make the tough call as to whom we think stands the best chance of obtaining approval."

However, the NDA has already made a noticeable difference in Limpopo Province, and specifically within the early childhood development (ECD) sector. "ECD is very close to my heart," reveals the Professor, "since to my mind it is currently the biggest weakness in our education system. Every year one hears complaints about the matric pass rate, but matric is simply the apex of an education that begins in pre-primary and primary school."

The Professor explains that the NDA has carved a niche for itself in the ECD sector in Limpopo, having supported no less than 130 ECD centres with infrastructure development and capacity-building. "The wonderful thing is that ECD not only impacts on children. Parents learn in the process and are also given the opportunity to find employment knowing that their children are being tended to. In addition, the ECD sector provides employment for many women, which liberates them economically.

"The Agency has provided sustenance to ailing civil society organisations that provide permanent jobs to people who would otherwise be unemployed and poor. The lifeline provided by the NDA has contributed towards the strengthening of community-based organisations, and has provided sorely needed funds to a number of cooperatives.

"Since its establishment in 2000, the NDA has grown significantly in relation to its mandate. It has assisted the poorest of the poor – those people on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder – and it has done so with limited funds. Therefore the search for further resources is an ongoing one if we are to meet our target of halving poverty by 2014."





This was to enable the organisation to achieve its other goals, to become efficient and effective going forward. Worth noting is that the Agency strengthened its capacity by building the Human Resources Unit, filling critical vacancies, and increasing efforts in the areas of training and the education of staff.

The year saw R89.9-million in grant funding to 78 CSOs, NGOs and cooperatives approved by the Board, benefiting 9 725 people directly and 229 361 indirectly throughout the country. The biggest amounts of these grants went to those provinces with the largest population of rural and poor, namely KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape.

The following financial year brought more changes for the organisation, beginning with the resignation of the CEO. As noted by former Chief Operations Officer+ Rashida Issel, by then the NDA had a solid foundation of stability. "Unlike many organisations, the NDA's objective is not to make a profit, but to grant funding for development projects in poor communities and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the CSOs that instigate, set up and manage such projects."

To achieve this objective, the NDA's strategic goals for 2008-2009 were to establish and promote partnerships that leverage funds and capabilities, to facilitate research that informs grant-funding decisions and policy, and to build and sustain its capabilities. In pursuit of these goals, the NDA granted more than R85.8-million to 59 projects, mostly in rural areas, where it felt that the funds could make the most difference. The NDA also tackled concerns regarding risk management, both conducting a complete assessment of the risks facing the Agency and developing plans to address them.

The year 2009 saw the Agency approve 77 projects at a cost of R95-million and directly benefitting nearly 7 400 people. These projects included 11 food security projects, 45 income-generating projects, 15 agricultural and agribusiness projects, and the funding of six NGO networks.

In addition to defining a revised 2010-2013 strategic plan, Issel notes that the NDA improved its turnaround time for project payments after Board approval, its compliance with corporate governance requirements, and its positioning through numerous initiatives, and had completed various research studies.

As the NDA entered its tenth year of operation, the Minister of Social Development, Bathabile Dlamini, noted that, to date, the Agency had distributed over R1-billion to NGOs undertaking development projects in poor communities. The amount is broken down in the pie chart on the following page. In this landmark year, while the Agency only committed an amount of R42.9-million in funding towards 43 poverty alleviation projects across the country, it began afresh with the appointment of a permanent CEO, Vuyelwa Nhlapo, and a new 11-member Board.

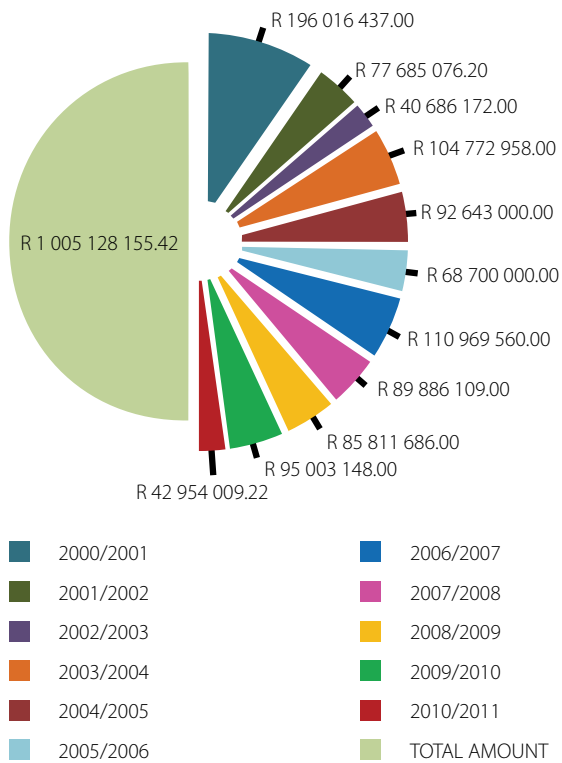


Growing Together

Nellie Matiwane, who is a 15-year veteran of the National Development Agency (NDA) and Transitional National Development Trust (TNDT), started out as an office attendant, progressed to receptionist and is currently a Registry Officer.

"In many ways, I have grown the same way the Agency has," she says with a smile. "When we started out, there were very little resources. Today, we have structures in place and we are able to service all the provinces, which makes a big difference in terms of what we are able to achieve." She points out that lessons learnt in the field have been put to good use by the Agency. A lot of development work has been done, both internally and externally, thereby ensuring that project assessments are far more effective than before.

"I have learnt a great deal about South Africa and its people during my time with the NDA. I have also come to appreciate the fact that there is a dire need to assist the many poor communities in our land, and that we have a lot to do if we want to make inroads in our fight against poverty."



**Board-Approved Project Funding 2000/2001 to 2010/2011
Financial Years**

The Board adopted a new strategy, instituted a business process review and adopted human resource initiatives that it hopes will greatly enhance the NDA's ability to deliver on its mandate. Nhlapo observes that the monitoring and evaluation of funded projects remains a challenge, but that management continues to implement measures to enforce proper monitoring and tackle noncompliance with funding agreements, all while building capacity.

A Second Decade of Delivery

If it is to meet the challenge of its mandate, the NDA's strategies, processes and capacity are likely to continue being challenged as it enters its second decade of delivery. After all, the NDA is only one weapon in government's arsenal in the War on Poverty, albeit a significant one.

There are other players with other mandates, and the NDA is committed to working closely with them to ensure that there is no duplication of effort, and that the sum of the parts in this war is greater than the whole.

Having reflected extensively on the history of the Agency, it is worth considering the Agency's 2011/2016 strategic plan, which is informed by the Millennium Development Goals, the five Government Priorities, the 12 Government Outcomes, the

A Job Less Ordinary

Mention Gaabidiwe Khaole's name to any of the founding members of the Tshwaraganang Barolong Project in the North West and you will be sure to raise a big smile. Gaabi, as they affectionately refer to him, epitomises the hard-working and deeply committed National Development Agency (NDA) employee who this project's leadership has come to know during their years of interaction with the Agency.

Khaole joined the NDA fresh out of university for what was originally meant to be a six-month internship. At the end of this period, the Agency offered him a further two-month extension, and before this expired he was offered a permanent position.

During his postgraduate studies he focused on social development and saw the opportunity at the NDA as a chance to fulfil what he viewed as a calling.

"What was supposed to be a fantastic opportunity that would last for a few months turned out to be some of the most fulfilling professional years of my life," shares Khaole, who is currently working at Standard Bank in the North West Province, where he heads up the bank's public-sector relations.

"It obviously helped that I have an interest in public speaking, business issues and social development. The fact that I was deployed in the North West Province was a boon because I was raised in this area and could identify with the types of challenges potential projects would run up against."

During his time with the NDA, social entrepreneurship started to take hold in South Africa and Khaole spent a fair amount of his time ensuring that projects struck the right balance between profitability and maintaining the traditional values of the community.

"If there is one thing the NDA is very good at, it is making an impact on the ground," he stresses. "It has a knack for helping projects maintain momentum or get up and running. This is not something other agencies are able to do. To be frank, some of them are in no way equipped to deal with the types of challenges that the NDA faces when setting up projects."

"You really need to be an all-rounder who can make things happen. Your ability to relate to the environment and handle the changing dynamics is absolutely critical, and this can often be the difference between success and failure."

He remains concerned by the short funding cycle that the NDA has to work within. In his view, a period of longer than three years is needed to ensure that projects are truly sustain-



Government-wide Programme of Action, provincial growth and development programmes, and local economic development.

Nhlapo notes that this strategy defines a 'niche' for the NDA to deliver on its legislative mandate and to contribute to government targets.

It further positions the NDA as a relevant and strategic role player that is geared towards supporting the critical development initiatives of CSOs and government at different levels.

This strategic plan recognises that the provision of grants needs to be complemented by a comprehensive capacity-building programme that will empower communities to take charge of their own development agenda and collective sustainable destinies.

Such a well-capacitated civil society will deepen participatory democracy and improve service delivery by local government. It will also create a pool of partners who can work with government to deliver services to communities and be in a position to absorb development resources available both within and outside government.

In terms of the 2011/2016 strategy, the NDA will make a targeted contribution to the eradication of poverty, with a more specific focus on:

- ▶ Rural development to achieve sustainable livelihoods.
- ▶ Granting funds and providing quality capacity-building support to CSOs to enable them to effectively contribute to poverty eradication initiatives and improve social cohesion.
- ▶ Supporting organisations dealing with vulnerable groups and early childhood development in order to foster social cohesion and create safe and prosperous communities.
- ▶ Facilitating platforms for state, civil society and the private sector to debate and consult on development policy as it relates to poverty eradication.

"As a government entity, we will continue to be extremely relevant given government's focus on improving rural livelihoods, quality of education and commitment to social cohesion, as well as general improvements in service delivery to the poor. We will continue to leverage resources through strategic partnerships with both the public and private sectors to optimise our impact on poverty eradication," noted Nhlapo in her overview of the strategy.

"The NDA will implement the Strategic Plan 2011-2016 with vigour. We hope that this firm commitment will contribute to realising government priorities on the creation of decent work and sustainable livelihoods, rural development, food security and land reform," she concluded.

Clearly, the NDA's continued emphasis is on maximising the impact it achieves with the limited resources at its disposal. We can only keep alive what the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, memorably termed the "Audacity of Hope" by making sure that everything we do has a measurable impact on the most vulnerable of our society.



able. A longer period will allow for the requisite capacity to be built and for the projects to start taking firm root.

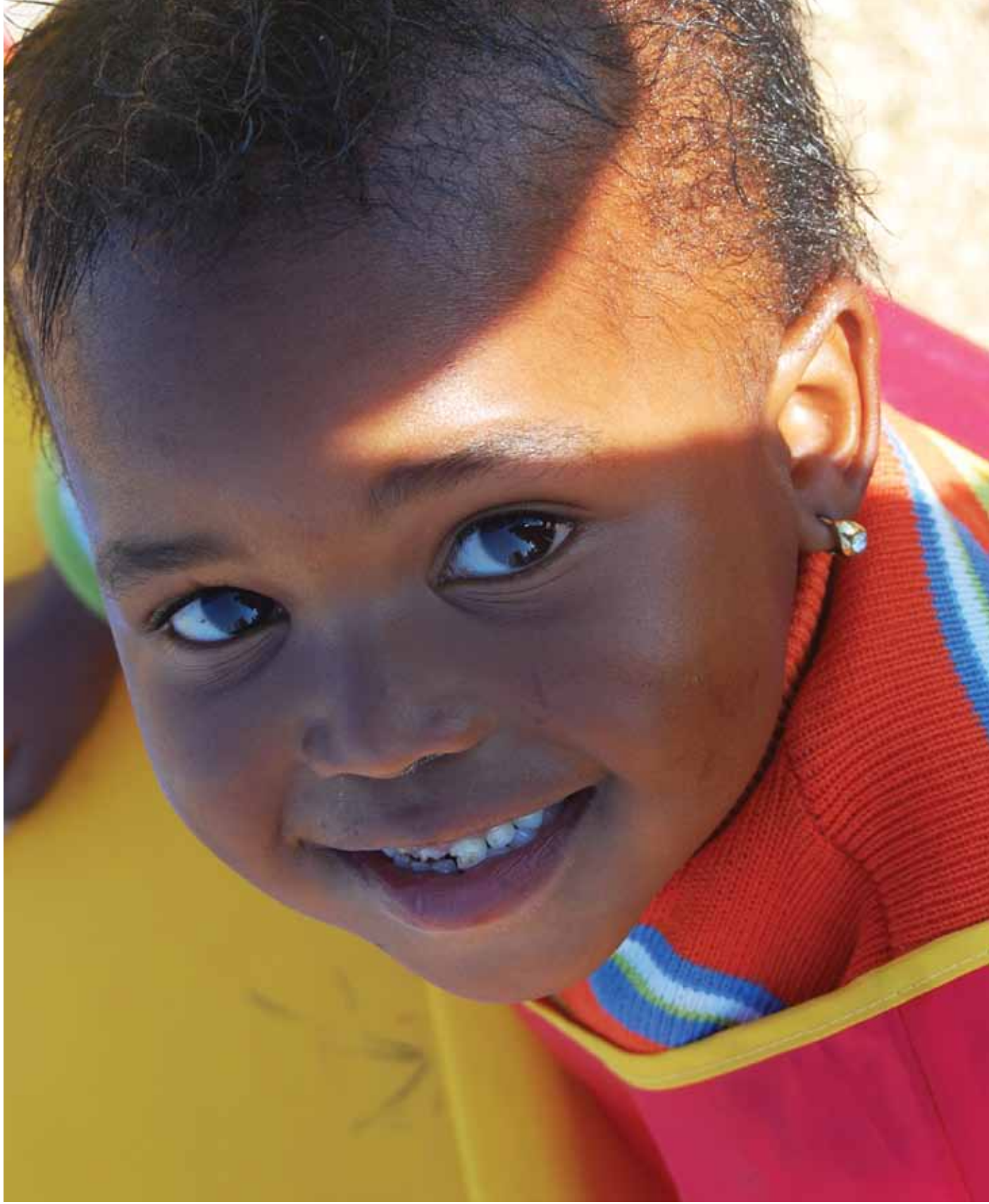
While Khaole is wary of any potential form of dependency developing when the NDA is involved in a project over the long term, his experience has shown that projects can often take twice as long as the mandated funding period before they really start to take off.

"The NDA has always been conscious of ensuring that good governance structures are in place in order to ensure that monies are correctly spent. However, the challenge remains that in some situations people with relatively little experience in managing budgets suddenly find themselves in charge of large sums of money. This can prove tricky, and in some instances it leads to tension in communities."

He acknowledges that the NDA has in recent years moved towards a funding model whereby it purchases the capital goods and assets for projects. This approach has minimised temptation and protects communities against potentially poor investments in assets.

"I don't think these challenges are unique to the NDA; similar organisations around the globe have the same considerations to confront, and there is certainly no single answer to them," he avers. "The reality is that I learnt and grew a tremendous amount during my time with the NDA. In particular, Reuben, who took me under his wing and mentored me, is someone to whom I will always owe a debt of gratitude. In fact, I owe the entire NDA a lot of gratitude because the Agency gave me my first break and allowed me to pursue my life's passion."

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



Bright Eyes

'Tshepang' means 'hope', and that is exactly what this wonderful project is bringing to the people of the Eastern Free State. The Tshepang Project is really about bringing hope for the future to poor rural and disadvantaged women and children through education. However, education takes many forms, and this is where Tshepang excels as the education has been developed to be meaningful to the people it serves.

As a non profit organisation that has been in the field for 16 years, Tshepang, as a member of the ECD Alliance (Early Childhood Development), has brought hope and a future to the poorest of the poor in the deep rural areas. However, this wonderful project only came to its rights in 2006 as a training facility for pre-school teachers. Staff members then realised that there are a large number of pre-school children, estimated at 65%, that are running in the streets without ever being exposed to any playgroups or pre-school training before going to school.

Tshepang then started a project where it used an a light delivery vehicle (LDV) loaded with toys to go to informal settlements. These toys were then made available to children to play with. Soon, the LDV not only went to Bohlokong, but also to Senekal, Fauriesburg and Paul Roux. Mothers were invited to come and participate in letting their pre-school children play with the toys.

The project soon grew, but numerous problems were experienced – especially problems regarding wet and cold weather, and the fact that some people were too poor to have the means to attend. "Also, some parents did not know about the benefits of the programme, so they were not motivated to attend or to participate. This needed to be changed," says Alice Chomane, Tshepang Project Leader.

Although this was a major stumbling block, Alice and her team tackled the problem head-on and devised a plan to overcome such problems and treat them as opportunities. ABSA showed a keen interest in the toys project and purchased educational toys for use by the children. This partnership again gave way to the involvement of the National Development Agency (NDA) in 2009, where a truck was purchased and changed into a suitable mobile unit that could operate in foul weather and thus ensure regular visits to surrounding areas.

In addition to this, the NDA also broadened its support of the project by branding the truck, training the driver and also increasing its participation so that pre-school teachers could be trained to deal with the specific circumstances in the area, thereby educating more parents and children in need.

Through the regular visits of the team, the involvement of the parents and children increased. Parents also received education, and frequent assessments by the trainers ensured that the correct analysis was done and that parents were helped accordingly. As one of the mothers told me during a site visit, "I can now understand and help my child at home". This has really built the self-esteem of the parents.

It was during this time that First National Bank (FNB) and other entities became involved with the project, and this helped it to grow. The Department of Social Development funded the purchase of a second mobile unit, which again helped the project to reach more mothers and children.

The involvement and participation of the parents and the communities now became crucial for the Tshepang Project, as it was the only way to alleviate poverty in the areas serviced. The team started to provide training to interested mothers who attended the playgroups in the ECD programmes, and successfully trained mothers became Family Community Motivators FCM's. This training is possible because the Tshepang Education Centre was accredited as a registered private Further Education and Training (FET) college that can offer accredited ECD qualifications from National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 1 to Level 4.

Every FCM volunteer will visit 10 families per week and take a toy along to play with the children. The volunteers talk to parents to find out what their needs may be, where they need specialised attention, and to suggest who they may contact to help with problems. The children are also assessed at the same time, and any problems are reported. All the FCMs join in the visits conducted through the mobile units once a week, where they again mingle with the children, train them and discuss issues with the parents.

Future developments are on the map for Tshepang, as it is imperative for the project to expand so that it can reach as many pre-school children in the informal settlements as possible. It is heart-warming to see how much is achieved through this programme, and how much it means to the children and the mothers who attend the playgroups. The community's children and parents are gaining critical education that will ensure that the children's development and future will look much brighter.

Tshepang is not limiting its training just to the education of the pre-school children. It is also actively involved in training mothers to start vegetable gardens in order to place good food on their table and bolster their self-esteem and confidence.

"It is unbelievable how many challenges have been resolved by this dedicated team. The parents and children love to be part of this project, since it really contributes towards children's wellbeing and prosperity. With the help of the grants of the NDA, this project has made a tremendous difference to the lives of the very poor," says Alice.

"We are growing, thanks to the generosity of our partners and their foresight to see the end goal. Our vision is that the project will have even more impact on the communities we serve, and that through that impact we will be able to get more partners on board who will help us to alleviate the illiterate conditions experienced by our pre-school children and their parents. In this way, they too can become proud people finding their rightful place in our community and country," explains Alice.

During our visit to a playgroup at a mobile unit, we experienced first-hand the gratitude of the community towards the Tshepang Project and the NDA for the great "present" they have brought to these impoverished people. One of the mothers said to me: "Our children's eyes were dull before. Now they shine. The children are stimulated and they will be ready when they go to school." When we left, the mothers sang us a song in which they praised the NDA for its life-giving support.



Family Matters

Ncomeka Mdleleni proudly pages through a file containing the certificates of all the courses she has attended during the last decade. Prominent amongst the raft of qualifications are those focusing on childhood development, caregiver skills, project planning, developmental studies, and HIV/Aids prevention and counselling courses.

“What do you think?” she asks with a teasing smile. Before I can respond, she says: “It’s not bad for an old lady from a rural region.” While we are still laughing, the chattering of children in the corridor outside her office draws her attention back to the reason she has undertaken the additional skills development – the young toddlers who are left in her daily care.

“It is not easy getting funding from an institution like the National Development Agency (NDA). It has many requirements you need to meet, and I realised early on that my chances of getting funding would be slim if I didn’t get my house in order,” she notes.

Started in 1999, the No Family Pre-School Centre was initially funded through a local nonprofit organisation that handled the funding application on behalf of Ncomeka. The centre has since been through the necessary process to get itself registered, and is certified to handle a maximum of 60 children.

In 2002, the NDA assisted with funding for a new structure in the rural village of Confinvaba, some 100km outside Queenstown in the Eastern Cape. The new building was a significant boost for the centre, which started out in a corrugated iron-clad shed and later moved to a rondavel.

“By the time we were in the rondavel we had already grown to 27 children and the situation had become very difficult,” recounts Ncomeka. “Moving into this building in a centralised location made quite a difference to the service we could offer.”

The number of toddlers at the centre climbed steadily during most of the past decade, but started to tail off over the last few years. At present, there are only 15 children making use of the facility.

“The cost of living is becoming very high and people are feeling the pressure. Our focus at the crèche is taking in children who have no parents. Typically, they are living with their grandparents, and these people usually pay R10 per month for our service, but even this is starting to become unaffordable for some of the elderly people.”

The grant she is receiving from the Department of Social Development varies from R7 000 to as little as a few hundred rand per month. This poses a challenge with respect to the salaries of the two teachers employed by the school. Ncomeka says that she is not sure why the monies fluctuate on a monthly basis.

Not being one to dwell on challenges for too long, she has started a food garden, not only to supplement the food given to the children but also to allow her to sell the excess produce to the community.

“Our environment is not an easy one. However, I have equipped myself with the right knowledge and I know that, with the continued support of the community, our centre will continue to deliver a valuable service.”



INCOME GENERATION

Going for Gold

The learner-beneficiaries of the Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project have broken for lunch and are chatting amiably in the courtyard. But well before classes are set to commence again, they are already streaming into the building, their eyes gleaming with enthusiasm. “They are busy with the theoretical component of their training, but I can see that they can’t wait to get their hands dirty with the machinery,” says Managing Director Stanley Mkhize with a smile.

The Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project was launched in 2004 and is based at the Rand Refinery in Germiston. The project provides skills programmes and learnerships from National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Levels 2 to 4 to beneficiaries within the jewellery-making trade. Beneficiaries are taught to work with most materials, from gold through to silver and copper, and the training programmes can last anything from four to 16 months, depending on the nature of the training.

“We also have a strong focus on health and safety, since beneficiaries need to know how to keep safe while doing their work,” explains Stanley. This is borne out by countless safety posters on the walls, and painted lines on the workshop floors denoting ‘safe’ walkways that keep passers-by at a safe distance from machinery.

It is with regard to this machinery that the National Development Agency (NDA) has really made a difference. “Machinery in this trade is expensive, so we responded to an advertisement posted by the NDA and applied for funding. The NDA did its inspections and carried out its audit process, and the Agency then came on board in 2007 with a first-tranche donation of just over R900 000, most of which was allocated to the acquisition of equipment and tools,” explains Stanley.

This machinery has done more than assist the Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project in providing practical training to its learner-beneficiaries. “The machinery has given us enough capacity to offer casting and mass-production work to retail jewellers. This not only means that beneficiaries are gaining exposure to the commercial jewellery environment, but it also means that the project has the opportunity to make a profit, which we hope will assist us in achieving sustainability and financial independence.”

For Stanley, it is extremely important that there is a direct link between the training provided and the workplace environment. When recruiting learners, representatives from the Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project go to local organised youth centres in the East Rand area – especially in impoverished areas such as Vosloorus and Tembisa – to explain the nature of the project and to gauge which youths have an interest in the trade.

“Most of the learners we target are under 35 years of age and are unemployed, and some of them don’t even have their senior certificates. For many, this is one of very few opportunities to gain skills and prepare themselves for formal employment or entrepreneurship. The need is such that while we may target 50 learners, we end up with as many as 200 applicants, and this is where the selection process comes in,” says Stanley.

When asked about what they look for in a recruit, Stanley says emphatically that he imagines the learner working for a commercial jeweller. “I try to find out whether the potential learner has the professionalism and attitude needed to succeed in the workplace, since this is the ultimate goal of what we are doing at the Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project.”

And this approach has paid dividends. Stanley proudly explains how many of the local jewellers have employed graduates from the project. “When they came to us, these learner-beneficiaries had limited skills and very few opportunities for employment. Now they are skilled in a trade, have been employed on a full-time basis by a commercial operation, and are probably the ones paying the bills in their household,” he says.

However, Stanley is also proud of the progress that the Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project is making towards sustainability. “In 2011 around 300 learner-beneficiaries came through the project for assessment by the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA), and over 85% of them were found to be competent. In addition, we have been certified as a training provider by the MQA until 2014,” enthuses Stanley.

The future for Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project looks bright and shiny. “We have received exceptional support, from the NDA and from the likes of Rand Refinery, which sponsors our premises and also provides us with some raw materials – such as silver – that we use for training purposes.

“However, with all this support we feel that the onus is on us to prove our sustainability. The NDA has enabled us to be a top-notch workshop. In fact, sometimes the demand for our services from commercial retailers is such that there is enough work for up to 100 people.

“But, looking forward, we want to move beyond doing casting and mass-production work for commercial jewellers towards having our own jewellery on display at the retailers themselves. This will help us in marketing our brand and establishing the Intsika name in the marketplace, and our jewellery is generally well-priced since we don’t have the large overhead expenses of more commercial jewellery manufacturers,” explains Stanley.

“We’d also like to duplicate the lessons learnt here in training centres in other areas, and specifically in rural areas. We have already opened another branch in Boksburg, and we would like to expand even further,” says Stanley. It is now evident that the learner-beneficiaries get the gleam in their eyes from Stanley himself, who dreams of exporting Intsika jewellery to countries such as Saudi Arabia and so contributing not only to further job creation, but also to the economic development of the country as a whole. The future for the Intsika Skills Beneficiation Project is bright indeed.





Joining Hands

Luckhoff may be unknown to most people, and its residents may be far away from the buzz of business. However, do not think that they are not clued up when it comes to sheep and cattle farming. I had the opportunity to meet Ben Poloane and a number of the Thaba Noka Cooperative beneficiaries to discuss their business, hardships and successes.

The beneficiaries beam from ear to ear when I ask them about the input from the National Development Agency (NDA) and the service it provided. The Thaba Noka Cooperative was launched in 2009 when Mr Bloem helped the community start a sheep farming business. Mr Van Zyl, another farmer, also became involved and has been a mentor ever since for the beneficiaries of the cooperative.

Thaba Noka used the grant received from the NDA to buy sheep. This, together with the training received by members of the cooperative, has allowed them to be very successful. They could also purchase an a light delivery vehicle (LDV) for their farming requirements.

As with any business, starting capital is a much-needed commodity, and so the cooperative also obtained a loan from Griekwaland West Co-op (GWP). The GWP also keeps tabs on the finances and sees to it that Thaba Noka does not pay too much for services and that it does not spend money at the wrong time.

Ben is proud of the fact that although they started with 63 cattle and around 600 Dorper sheep – and although they had a 7% loss due to sickness and wild animals taking the sheep – they still increase their numbers continually through new births. “We have also been very successful in selling our cattle and sheep at auctions in the region and through the different abattoirs. With the help of our mentors, we are now able to determine whether the stock’s condition is good for selling, and what is a good price to obtain when selling,” he explains.

Ben and the 14 beneficiaries are all involved in the day-to-day running of the business, and they rent a farm, Sankoppies, from which they operate. In addition, they also employ two other people from the community to help with their work.

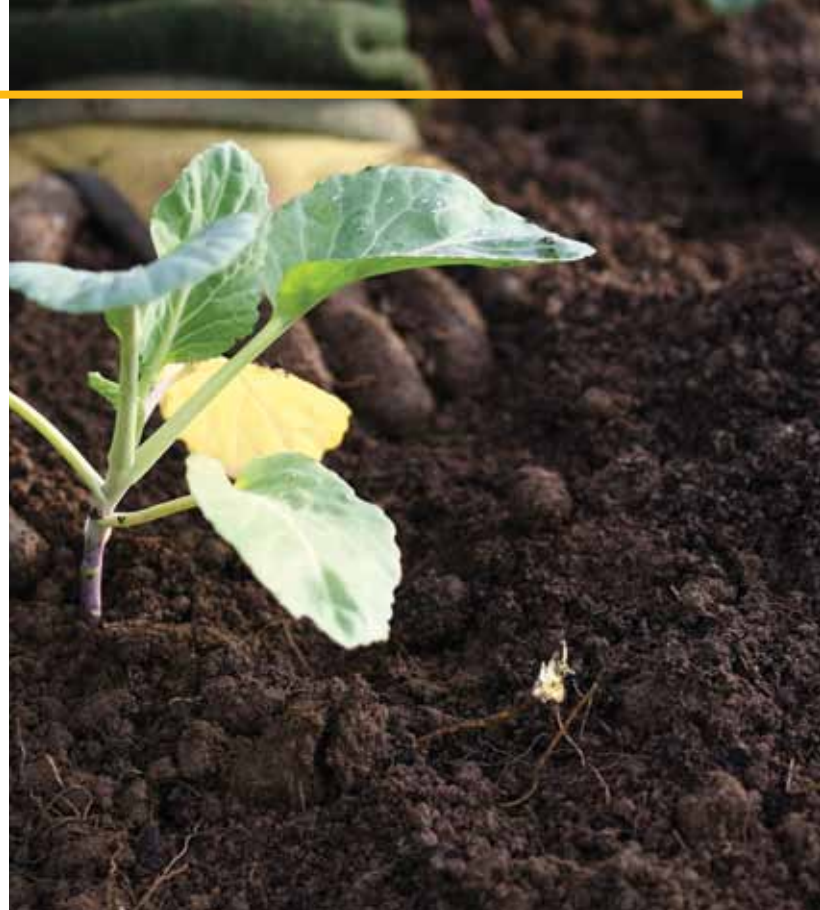
“Being a sheep farmer has its challenges, and we are always trying to overcome these in order to be more efficient and profitable,” says Ben. “Rentals are a problem, and so is the cost of new stock. These really eat into our money. If it were not for Messrs Bloem and Van Zyl – and, of course, the NDA – these challenges would have been detrimental to our business. Transport and marketing costs also affect us, and again our mentors come to the rescue as they always recommend our products when they meet with prospective clients and service providers,” says Ben.

Ben is very proud of the birth rate of animals, and this season Thaba Noka has had 120 lambs and around 30 calves. With this in mind, beneficiaries would love to be able to grow their livestock to 1 000 sheep and 500 cattle. Ben explains that, to do this, they will need to buy their own 16 000-hectare farm, and then their dream will be realised as they can then employ a larger number of people from the community.

Ben further states that the beneficiaries are all adamant that the farm must also grow vegetables for the community, and that these vegetables can also be sold at the markets. At present, the cooperative delivers products to the community as part of its programme to uplift the community and counter poverty.

Karin Kruger from the GWP says that she is very proud of the members of Thaba Noka. “They are truly committed to the project and they are really very successful in their venture,” she says. Karin is helping them on a voluntary basis, and takes pride in the fact that they are eager to learn and to abide by business rules and practices.

I also spoke to mentor Jan van Zyl, who says that he is very positive about the team and is confident that they will achieve even greater success. He explains that not one of the beneficiaries has taken a salary; all the money will be ploughed back into the project until it has grown to a level where it is self-sustainable and profitable. Indeed, the Thaba Noka Cooperative is a showpiece of how community members and local farmers can work together to create a true South African success story.



Land Reform in Action

At the start of the photo session, members of the Delindlala Farmers' Cooperative proudly group around the trophy the cooperative recently won as the runner-up in the Female Entrepreneur of the Year Awards. Sponsored by the Eastern Cape Agricultural Department, the awards recognise those female entrepreneurs in the agricultural field who have made great strides in building their operations.

This recognition is important for the farm because it not only serves as recognition for the work it has done during the past decade, but it also reflects the success that has been achieved under the Land Distribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) Programme.

After the photo session has been concluded and the members have reminded one another that the award is proof of the fact that, as a team, they have the 'right stuff' to make their project work, they drift away to tackle their various responsibilities on the farm.

"The funding from the National Development Agency (NDA) came at the right time for us," says Deputy-Secretary Makatesi Nolikhaya. "The Agency helped us get our dairy production back on track with the purchase of 20 Friesland cows, a milking machine and a cooler. It also helped us get the right training so that we can make proper use of the equipment. At present, we are selling our milk to the local community and this is providing an important income stream for us."

Established in 1999 in the Lupapasi Village, a deep rural area of the Eastern Cape, the members of the cooperative applied for an LRAD grant, and in 2001 they acquired a farm just outside Indwe. The farm is 2 019-hectares in size, with a little under 50% of the land comprising of hilly terrain.

It is a mixed farming operation, with livestock, dairy and the growing of produce and animal feed all being conducted on the farm. The 40 members of the cooperative are all active in the management and working of the farm. In fact, the majority of them reside on the property.

"It makes it a lot simpler if we stay here during the week and return to our families in the village on the weekend," says Deputy-Chairperson Qayi Nozolile. "There is always much to do, particularly because we are involved in a variety of farming activities."

The farm has had good harvests of potatoes and cabbages in recent years, and this past season it harvested some 60 000 cabbages. The produce is sold either to the Boxer supermarket chain, the local Spar, schools in the region or the East London municipal market.

One of the biggest challenges the farm faces is access to market. Tendo Bengu, who is in charge of market delivery, says that they are hamstrung by the fact that they only have one light delivery vehicle available.

"This vehicle covers extremely long distances. I sometimes think it is overworked when I remember all the things it does on the farm. If we had a 5- or 8-ton truck available, we could easily get produce to the market and extend our range, possibly finding new markets for our produce." The farm is also looking to increase the level of mechanisation in its daily activities, as this will help it to increase efficiency.

"We have been successful and managed to sustain ourselves for quite some time. I have no doubt that we will be able to continue, and it is very important – not only for us, but also so that we can set an example for other LRAD beneficiaries – that we continue to make significant strides in the future," concludes Makatesi.

Looking After Your Own

“It’s hard to imagine when you look at us now, but the women who work here all started out having to face tremendous tragedy.” So says Julia Links, General Manager of Future Creations Co-operative Limited, about the staff members who work furiously to make school uniforms, corporate clothing, medical wear and other clothes.

In 2002, a large textile business relocated from Kimberley to Newcastle, leaving more than 500 local residents jobless. “It was absolutely devastating,” reveals Julia. “Even though we were all skilled in manufacturing clothing, we had no way of putting food on our tables.” However, community members decided that they would face up to the challenge rather than becoming its victims, and so Future Creations was registered in 2006.

“We decided that we needed to find a way to generate income for ourselves, rather than having to rely on an employer to do this for us. Once we registered the cooperative, we went to Dipuo Peters, who was then the Northern Cape Premier. We explained that we needed funding to get our business off the ground, and she referred us to the National Development Agency (NDA).”

Julia is not shy to admit that the NDA’s assistance has made all the difference. “The Agency gave us an initial amount of R1.2-million in 2008 for operational costs and materials, and as a stipend for workers. When I look back to when we launched the cooperative, it is clear that the NDA’s support is impacting on our sustainability even today. We would not be where we now are if it were not for the Agency’s assistance.”

Initially taking on only small orders for T-shirts and other garments, today Future Creations employs 21 people on a full-time basis. However, it still faces some challenges, with transport being chief among them. “It is a real challenge for us to get our products to market. There is a lot of demand for our clothing among government institutions and schools, but we don’t have a vehicle of our own so we need to rent one from the son of one of our staff members. Alternatively, we make use of couriers, which is a very expensive alternative,” she says.

Nonetheless, Julia is optimistic about the future, and she looks forward to expanding the business by growing its customer base, and perhaps even exporting some of the products. “We are also passionate about creating more employment opportunities. Many of our staff members are getting on in years, and once they retire we need to know that there are young and passionate people who will be able to come into the business and take up the reins. For this reason, sharing what we have learnt with the youth in our community is also a passion of ours.”

Julia insists that I extend a special thanks from her to the NDA. “We can always go to the NDA for assistance and advice, and the Agency’s doors are never closed. I really want to thank them for what they have done for the community in Kimberley. Without their support, we may have been unemployed, as is the fate of so many others in this area.”



In many ways, it is the tragedy that beset Kimberley that has also provided the biggest scope for growth for Future Creations. “When the large textile business relocated to Newcastle, it left a huge gap in the local market in terms of the manufacturing of clothing. Now, instead of having to purchase clothes from big towns like Bloemfontein and Johannesburg, our clients in Kimberley can find what they need on their very own doorstep,” concludes Julia.



Turning Point

As we disembark from our dusty vehicle after a long journey over rutted gravel roads, Mongameli Rode approaches with a mischievous grin. "I know you are probably not accustomed to this type of road, but it's the best we have at present."

Situated in the Amatole district of the Eastern Cape, Cata is home to approximately 500 households, with each household supporting in the region of six individuals. Mongameli is part of the Cata integrated community development project and is the Project Manager responsible for the agricultural cooperative. The agricultural initiative is focused on three areas, namely fruit trees, animal feeds and virgin crops – basically all forms of vegetables. The cooperative makes use of an irrigation system to water its produce.

The cooperative started in 2003 when members of the community got together and decided to make use of underutilised land. "We realised that if we put our land together, it would not only create work opportunities for the owners of the land, but there might also be opportunities to employ other people in the community," recounts Mongameli.

The community brought together several parcels of land and formed a 22-hectare cooperative. In the early days, the community members worked for no wages and survived solely on the income they generated from selling their produce.

"At that stage, we relied quite heavily on the help of volunteers," explains Mongameli. "While it was good to keep people busy and in the process allow them to acquire some skills, the problem with a volunteer-based approach is that you cannot really enforce discipline when people do not arrive for work on time."

The cooperative then decided to approach government for assistance and, through the Expanded Public Works Programme, it secured a monthly stipend for workers employed on a full-time basis. This allowed them to employ 26 individuals who worked from 7am to 5pm on a daily basis.

The contract for paying these workers commenced in September 2007 and expired in December 2011. This could not come at a worse time for the cooperative, as it is on the cusp of gaining a strong commercial footing in the market but cannot yet afford to pay salaries for 26 employees.

As a result of this development, these are trying times for Mongameli. At present, his fields are only tended eight days per month, with the assistance of volunteers from the Community Work Programme. He explains that this is not enough time to get all the work done that is needed in running a successful commercial operation.

"When you utilise the irrigation-type systems we have, you have to be in the field from early in the morning until late in the afternoon, particularly at this time of the year when crops are growing strongly and you need to weed them on a regular basis."

Despite the current situation, he is particularly proud of the quality of the cooperative's produce, and much of this has to do with training that was provided by the National Development

Agency (NDA). The workers were shown how to be efficient in terms of the irrigation farming they are doing, and how to maximise the yield from the crops. The result has been healthy crops for the project in its last year.

"The NDA didn't just train us with respect to working in the fields; it also helped us with marketing, how to package our produce, and what type of chemicals will be beneficial for the plants. In addition, the Agency also gave us financial training."

The cooperative supplies markets, supermarkets and the municipal market in King William's Town with its produce. The fact that these markets lie some distance away from the cooperative poses one of the biggest challenges. The access road to this region is not in very good shape, and the cooperative also has to share its vehicle with a number of other community-based projects in the region.

"I can't explain to you how difficult it is," says Mongameli. "Just yesterday, I was in town doing some marketing. A number of our regular clients said: 'We are interested in everything you have to offer. Get it to us as early as you can tomorrow morning. If you are with us by 6am, we will take it.' Unfortunately, I will only be able to get to town this afternoon, and by then many of them may have purchased from alternative suppliers."

Mongameli is also conscious of the need to make the most of the investment that was made by the NDA in the project. Approximately R1.7-million went into the installation and upgrading of the irrigation system, cold room and the building of a nursery. "The nursery is a fantastic facility that holds huge potential for us. At present, we are purchasing our seedlings, and if we were able to grow our own seedlings, it would make a huge difference to our cost. The problem is that we don't really have someone who has been properly trained in terms of seedling growth and management.

"Seedling production is an intensive undertaking. You need to irrigate them every hour, seven days a week, and we don't have somebody who can do this for us. The project is also able to grow lucerne, for which there is reasonable demand in the region." However, since the cooperative doesn't have proper baling and harvesting equipment, the process is not as efficient as it could be.





The project is currently bringing in between R5 000 and R20 000 per month, depending on the seasonal demands for its products. The cooperative's current mainstay is potatoes and cabbages, but it hopes to be able to supply apples and nectarines to the local market early next year.

"We will be starting with apples for the first time, and at this point we are quite optimistic. The nectarine harvest will be the second one, and while we were somewhat disappointed with the outcome of the first harvest, we have learned some important lessons.

"The cold room is also going to play an important role for us going forward. We now no longer need to be concerned about any of our produce spoiling in a very short time."

At present, Mongameli is concerned by the fact that things seem to be standing still. "It has been six months now since the conclusion of the contract, and the 26 people who were previously working here are now all sitting at home waiting for an outcome.

"It would be greatly advantageous for us if we could get clarity on where we stand with respect to the future, and if we could get help to employ people to start maximising the efficiency of our farm. We are clearly poised to start generating stronger income and sustain ourselves.

"However, if we don't get help soon, we could suffer quite a significant setback. At this point, the Border Rural Committee is assisting us wherever it can, but the reality is that we need more help. This community has a strong history of looking after itself and being willing to work. This is something we need to capitalise on, and it is important that people don't become discouraged."

Lodge Living

Perched on top of a hill outside Cata Village, the Cata self-catering chalets offer a perfect vantage point over the village and its surrounds. Not only is the setting idyllic, but visitors can also enjoy walking trails, mountain-biking trails and horseback riding, or simply bask in the natural splendour of the area.

The chalets form part of the integrated rural development initiative in the village, and are 100% community-owned

and -managed. "It has been a long journey that has taken us to this point and to the establishment of the chalets," shares Boniswa Tontsi.

"I suppose it really starts back in the 1960s with the enforced relocation of people from this area," she explains. "With the advent of democracy, an opportunity arose in 1998 for the community to apply for restitution funds. The community got together and put in an application, and in 2000 we were awarded with R11-million."

This money was equally distributed between individuals and the community at large. The individuals comprised 334 people who received 50% of the money, while the remainder of the funds was earmarked for several projects – specifically an irrigation scheme, forestry activities, the growing of pine and wattle, and infrastructure development.

"What you see around you in terms of roads and the improvement to the infrastructure was primarily driven by the community through the redistribution funds," explains Boniswa. "The chalets were never really something we thought about. In fact, tourism was not such a high priority for us when we started out. However, as things progressed and infrastructure changes took place, we started to realise that there was an opportunity to take advantage of our region's natural splendour.

"The whole community is focused on keeping an eye open for opportunities that can raise funds and draw money towards us. For instance, we are currently sharing our one vehicle with other projects in the village. It's not an ideal situation, and we would all like to have our own transport, but the reality is that this is currently all we can afford, and it is a solution we have to make work for us."

At this point, the chalets could benefit from better access roads. "I think we all could," says Boniswa. "However, as word spreads and more people visit us and enjoy our hospitality, the numbers are slowly increasing." She also believes that people are willing to venture further and further away from the beaten track when it comes to holiday destinations, and that this bodes well for the tourism project in the future.

Aside from insuring that the buildings are well maintained, the only 'wish list' addition at this stage is that of a store room in order to keep some of the equipment locked away. "People are really happy with the facilities and, as you can see, they are of a very good standard. For a number of years, the project has received awards in the Amatole municipal district recognition programme for the outstanding work it has done, so there can be little doubt that visitors will enjoy a world-class experience."

A New Lease on Life

Lulama Jama, a retired forest guard, has found a new opportunity as caretaker at the Cata chalets. "I must say that it makes me very proud to be involved with this community, and with this project in particular. We have come a long way against many odds, and I'm really happy to be playing a part."

"Lulama is one of our most committed workers," says Boniswa. "Visitors sometimes land relatively late in the evening at the East London airport. Thereafter, they still have to undertake the drive out to us. This means that they arrive very late at night.

"I am always secure in the knowledge that I can phone Lulama at any time and tell him that we are expecting visitors who are going to arrive late. There is never any quibbling from him, no matter what time of the day it is and no matter what the requirements are from the guests. This is the type of professional attitude we like to project, because this will lead us to success."





Bootstrap Success

When Fikile Zikhali takes me to the workshop of Ujima Bakwena, there are only a handful of people milling about, but one can almost sense the humming of sewing machines and other machinery that usually fills the air of this shoe-making workshop in the heart of Roodepoort.

“We just finished a large contract that saw just over 80 people employed on a temporary basis, and that’s in addition to the 17 full-time members of our cooperative. Some days it’s tough to meet the demand, and there are times when we work until midnight, only to be back at the workshop again early the next morning,” explains Fikile. “So we are all taking a well-deserved break before we start working on the next contract.”

Ujima Bakwena was launched in 2008 as the result of a merger between two shoe-making cooperatives, Ujima and Bakwena. “Between these two cooperatives there was a lot of knowledge of our trade, but those from Ujima had skills that were lacking among those in Bakwena, and vice versa,” says Fikile. “We realised that if we joined hands, we could combine those skills, so after we merged we spent a lot of time transferring skills and making sure that everyone in the business was up to speed.”

Ujima Bakwena clearly had the skills, but skills alone are not always enough to ensure the success of a business. Fikile admits that times were tough in 2008, and the economic recession simply added to the cooperative’s woes. For most of its 18 members (one member has since passed away), Ujima Bakwena was their only way of putting food on the table.

“The National Development Agency (NDA) really came to our rescue. At that time, some of our members couldn’t even come to work because they didn’t have enough money for transport. And while you can speak long and hard to potential supporters about why your particular initiative is a good one – and you can show someone the high quality of your product – what you really need is someone with an eye to really see the potential, and with an ear to really listen to what you are saying. This is what we got in the NDA.

“The NDA provided operational funding for aspects such as office furniture, stationery, computers and basic month-to-month overheads. This put us in a position to build a business during a very difficult year. In addition, we were provided with training in aspects such as financial management, general management and marketing.” Fikile has made particularly good use of the marketing skills she was provided with, as one soon realises that she is Ujima Bakwena’s most ardent and relentless promoter.

“There is a lot that distinguishes us from other businesses and cooperatives, and perhaps the most important thing is that we have managed to separate our own differences from our

focus on producing a quality product.” Many cooperatives fail because the interests of the various members begin to interfere with the running of a sound business, so Ujima Bakwena has a five-member executive team that manages the business side of things, with Fikile as its Chairperson.

Being very much a contract-based business, the executive team needs to ensure that the money made during peak times is managed properly so that the cooperative can survive the slower times. For this reason, the executive team budgets to ensure that expenses such as salaries and materials are covered for the whole year. “But it also helps that we have had the same members since we launched in 2008. We are work colleagues, but there is also a sense of family here as we are all in it together.”

It is perhaps this sense of family that makes Fikile so concerned about the fact that, at this stage, Ujima Bakwena is mostly able to provide only temporary work to those in surrounding communities. “This really is the biggest challenge for us. When we get contracts, large numbers of people come here to work and learn the skills of shoe-making.

“However, when those contracts come to an end, many of those temporary workers are back on the streets because they cannot find full-time employment. And it is on the streets that crime begins to take root. So, if I have one wish, it is that we will be able to offer more full-time employment opportunities,” explains Fikile.

One of the ways in which Ujima Bakwena would like to achieve this goal is by expanding the range of footwear it produces. “We are currently producing mostly school shoes, but if we are to become a truly sustainable business – and this is our objective – then we need to diversify our products so that we can offer all types of shoes, from school shoes through to retail.”

However, it is exceptionally difficult for a cooperative such as Ujima Bakwena to gain access to traditional retail outlets. Fikile laments the fact that while even limited shelf space in a retail shop would make a world of difference to the cooperative, its members and those it employs, retail shops are usually reluctant to work with a relatively small business operation such as Ujima Bakwena.

But Fikile never gives up hope, and she dreams of growing the business so that it can provide full-time employment for more people. She is also proud of the role Ujima Bakwena is already playing. “The temporary workers who work here come to us via government’s Expanded Public Works Programme, so we realise that, even in our own small way, we are helping in meeting government’s targets when it comes to job creation and poverty alleviation.”

Fikile is also proud of what Ujima Bakwena has achieved from a business point of view. “We have won some big projects from government, which shows that government is impressed by what we are doing and by the quality of our products. For example, one day we took a chance by responding to an advertisement to produce shoes for the South African Navy, and even though we are a relatively small business, we won the contract.

“We have also been awarded a number of business prizes in competitions where we were up against much larger cooperatives,” she says. The Ujima Bakwena workshop may be quiet today, but there is no doubt that soon the humming of machinery will once again be heard in the streets of Roodepoort.



A Cup Half-Full

“It is difficult for individuals to make a living in this area,” says Katrina Rooi, Chairperson of the Little Big Cup food security project in Liliefontein. “There are special infrastructure projects undertaken in the area from time to time, and while these do provide work opportunities, they are only temporary. Aside from community members who are active with small-scale agricultural activities, most people survive on social grants and pensions.”

As with any community, there are always a number of ill and indigent individuals who need assistance. With very little resources at their disposal, but with the support of the Department of Welfare, a group of enterprising women started a community soup kitchen in 2005.

“There was a desperate need for this,” explains Project Manager Doreen van Wyk. “There are a number of people who are receiving medication for HIV/Aids, and we all know that a healthy diet is an important element in their treatment process.”

In 2008, Doreen attended a regional presentation made by the National Development Agency (NDA). She realised that the soup kitchen project was something that could potentially interest the Agency, and so she approached it for assistance.

“What we really needed was assistance with the development of a food garden that could not only help us supplement the food we were distributing to the community, but also provide us with some excess we could sell to generate revenue. Our plans made sense to the NDA, and in 2008 the Agency came on board to support us with the necessary infrastructure to

develop a 2.5-hectare plot that we use for growing vegetables,” says Doreen.

According to Katrina, a wide variety of vegetables – including spinach, cauliflower, carrots, marrows and green beans – are planted on the plot. Last year, the group experimented with potatoes, and the demand proved so great that potatoes turned out to be one of their bestsellers. “We have also established a fruit orchard that has peach, apple, pear, nectarine and guava trees. We believe that fruit production also holds significant promise in terms of revenue generation.”

Doreen explains that at present the vegetables they produce are sold to local shops and schools that have feeding schemes. “We have even had interest from a school in Springbok.” While the project initially employed six people to tend to the plot, they have since trimmed this down to three people. A lot of this has to do with the fact that the stipend they were receiving for wages came to an end. “Sustainability is our first objective,” stresses Doreen. “We want to employ more people and create jobs, but not at the expense of what we have already achieved.”

Rising energy costs are putting pressure on the vegetable garden because the simple act of watering requires a diesel-driven borehole pump to be running. General transport costs are also very high because of the remote location of the village. To counter some of the effects of rising costs, the project has expanded into egg production with a number of layer hens. The eggs are currently sold to local shops.

“We are diversifying slightly into areas where we know there is demand. However, chickens also need feed and this costs money, so the plans we have in this regard we have to tackle gradually,” says Doreen.

Despite these challenges, the network of people served by the soup kitchen has grown considerably over the years. Katrina, who was one of the original caregivers in the community, notes that in the beginning they were reaching 26 people, but at present about 250 to 350 people benefit from the service they offer.



She also points out that the soup kitchen's efforts have been recognised on a regional scale, where it has received awards for female entrepreneurship and community-building. "We have achieved a lot. However, our burning desire still remains the creation of many more sustainable jobs for our community."

Liliefontein Lodge

With the need to increase the revenue flowing into the soup kitchen, community members and, in particular, members of the project started to consider options that they believed held promise. It was decided that leveraging off the passing tourist trade held the most potential, and with the support of the NDA the Liliefontein Lodge opened its doors at the beginning of 2011.

The lodge has six rooms, each with its own shower, toilet, television and air-conditioner. It is located close to the centre of Liliefontein, and members of the project live in close proximity in order to ensure that guests enjoy the best possible comfort during their stay.

Vera Engelbrecht, who has previous experience drawing visitors to Liliefontein through a culture camp initiative, took charge of the lodge. "We have had a steady flow of visitors since we opened. Our peak period is during the flower season, when lots of tourists visit this area."

At this point, marketing the lodge has proved to be more difficult than initially anticipated. One of the key stumbling blocks is the poor cell phone reception in the area, which hampers the process of making reservations and makes it difficult for the lodge to be marketed via the Internet.

However, Vera believes that the addition of a ladies bar and a lounge could generate more revenue for the community. "Not only will this possibly create a job opportunity or two, but it may also entice visitors to stay a little longer."

Eliza Pemiedue, Treasurer of the project, says that the success of the lodge is important to the community. "Everything we do ultimately leads back to the soup kitchen and generating revenue in order for it to help build the community."





Dedication Delivers

When asked about his ambition for the Likusasa Lethu fern-growing farm, Solomon Mhlongo gets straight to the point: “My goal is that this will be a professionally run farming operation that has a high degree of commercial success.”

Solomon’s desire to professionalise and increase the commercial viability of the farm crops up often during our conversation, and it is apparent that he will not easily be thwarted. In fact, this tenacious attitude has probably played an important role in the farm’s success.

Established in 1989, during the dwindling years of apartheid, the cooperative initially made use of a 10-hectare piece of land. There were 10 founding members, six of whom are still active on the farm, while the remaining four have since passed away.

The early years were not easy for the cooperative, and its members had to labour long and hard for any gains they made. According to Ntombi Sibija, one of the founding members and the Treasurer of the cooperative, farming activity will always demand some form of strenuous labour. Well into her 60s, she still works the fields on a daily basis.

“You have to stay close to the land. It is looking after you, so you need to look after it,” she states. “While demand is good for the ferns, there are many small things you have to attend to on a day-to-day basis if you want to ensure that you remain successful.”

The vast majority of the ferns cut at the farm are destined for the European export market, with most of them finding their way to florists in the Netherlands. The project has expanded over the years, acquiring 17 hectares from a neighbouring farm and, with the assistance of the National Development Agency (NDA), buying another 10 hectares of land in 2005. The Agency also provided funds for all the infrastructure needed to make fern farming possible on the newly acquired land.

The current Chairperson, Nomsa Mavusa, became involved in the project after the death of her husband, Obed, who was a founding member. She states that the project employs 120 people, and this number may increase during very busy periods with the hiring of some casual labourers.

As the ferns are not highly seasonal, the farm’s employees enjoy stable employment, although the yield from the ferns does tend to decrease during the winter months.

At present, steeply rising energy costs are being felt on the farm’s bottom line, and energy-efficient practices are the order of the day. “You can only delay the collection of cut ferns for so long before they start to wilt, but we try to coordinate our collection and delivery activities at the packing house in a manner that does not unnecessarily eat into our diesel stocks,” shares Ntombi.

The farm is also struggling with one of the refrigeration units in the packing house. It is not working, and this limits the production capacity during busy times as the cut batches of ferns have to be refrigerated.

A more serious challenge is the emergence of a fungus on the plants that results in some, but not all, of the ferns’ leaves appearing wilted while still on the plant. The Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Research Council have both been approached for assistance with the eradication of the spore, but at this stage there is no resolution in sight.



"They have been trying for some time to find a solution, but nothing has worked," explains Solomon. "At this stage, we are treating it the same way you would a chronic condition; you take medication on a regular basis. The only difference in our case is that we treat the problem with chemical solutions every fortnight."

While this has proved effective to date, it is costly and also does nothing to address the fact that ferns that have this fungus reflect a yield drop from 4 000 batches per hectare to as low as 2 500 batches per hectare.

However, despite the current challenges it is facing, the cooperative has big plans for the future. One of the first steps its members would like to take is to establish their own international brand. At present, all their exports are marketed and sold by another company, and while the demand has remained strong, they feel that there is a lot they can gain from establishing their own brand.

"We definitely need to move closer to our markets," confirms Solomon. "The information we receive about market conditions passes through too many communication channels before it reaches us. This means that we may, unintentionally, not respond to changing conditions and this could be bad news for us in the long term.

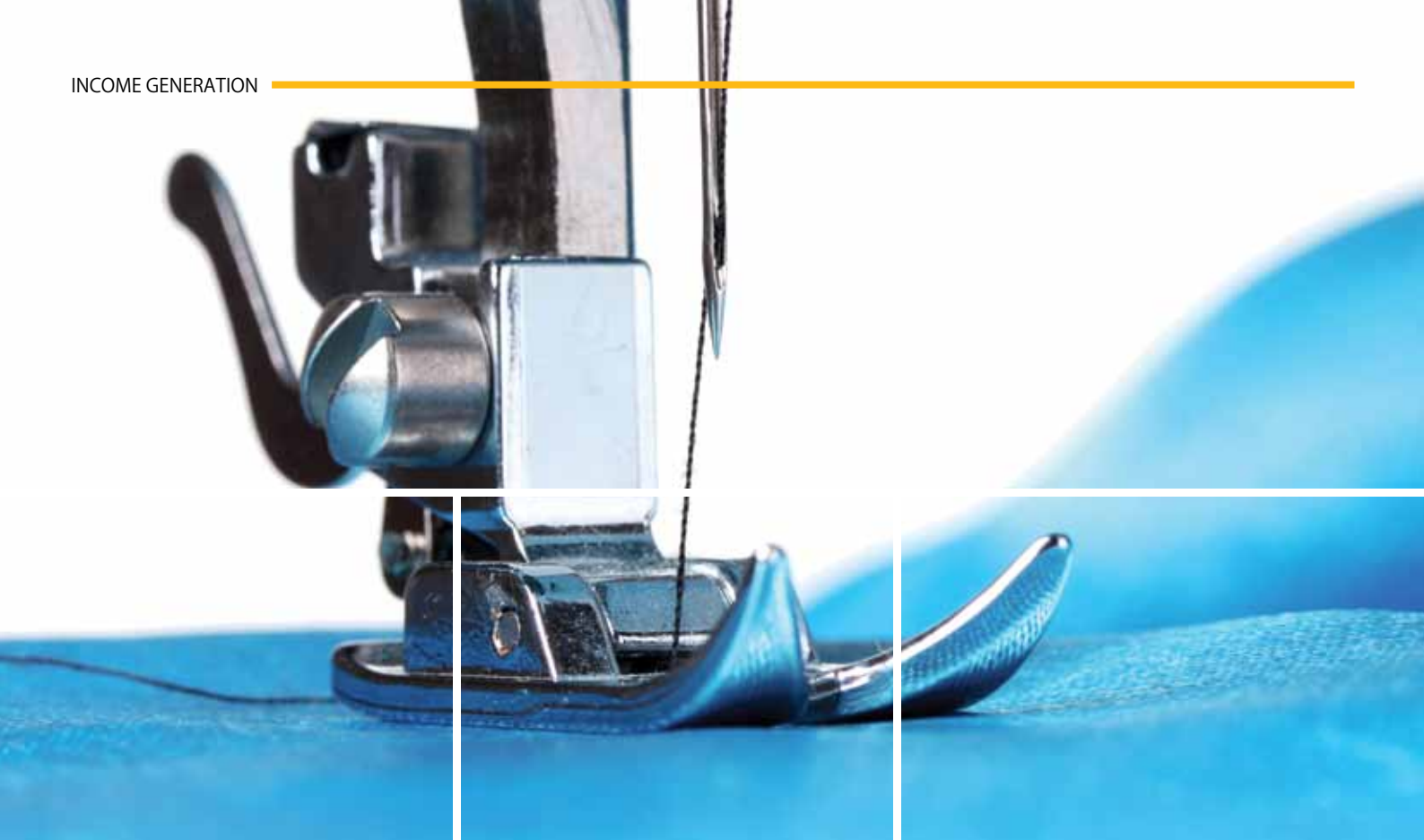
"There may also be value-adding opportunities that we can spot in the market that will not filter through to us because our distribution agent may not be familiar with our capabilities and not realise that we have the ability to exploit a situation."

However, before the cooperative can even think about extending its reach internationally, it wants to upgrade its processing facilities. "Currently, we are renting these facilities and it makes more sense for us to buy them. We don't have the funds for this type of undertaking and will have to consider what funding routes are open to us, because this is something we would like to do in the not-too-distant future."



All of this, Solomon is quick to remind me, is premised on a professionally run operation that can make the most of commercial opportunities that come its way. "We have worked really hard at making a success of the cooperative, and we have now reached the point where we are ready to take the next step.

"This entails appointing a farm manager who possesses an agricultural qualification and understands the dynamic environment that commercial farmers have to operate in. Once we get this done, we will start growing towards a new level." Considering the perseverance that the cooperative has shown during the past two decades, there is little doubt that it will make its ambitions a reality.



Returning Home

“This is where it all started,” says Mapule Lebakeng as she pats the wall of the weathered outbuilding next to her house in Madibogo. In 2000, this mother gave up her job and the life she and her husband had built for themselves in Johannesburg to return to the town of her birth.

“I answered a call from our community elders to return home and make a contribution to the upliftment of our community and its surrounds. It was not an easy decision to make, and my husband and I spent long hours discussing the issue of my return,” she reveals. “In the end, I realised that I have a responsibility to help build my community, and that I would never find rest if I didn’t respond to the appeal.”

Mapule kicked off with a small enterprise focused on the making of knitted garments, and she soon expanded into the production of household chemicals. In this manner, the Tshwaraganang Barolong Project was born. Her early success buoyed her, and in 2001 she put together a formal business plan and attracted the assistance of the local municipality.

“It took some time to get the paperwork sorted, but the project was eventually officially launched in 2003 by the then Premier of the North West Province, Edna Molewa,” she reveals. The launch of the project was also the first occasion in which she made contact with the National Development Agency (NDA), through representatives who were present at the launch function.

“I heard about the assistance the NDA offers to community-based organisations and approached it for help. The Agency advised me that it would have to study our business proposal

and assess the progress we had made before making a decision on whether it could help us.”

Soon after her initial contact with the NDA, Mapule was advised that the Agency wanted to work with her to further develop the capacity of the Tshwaraganang Barolong Project. “It was very exciting news, but it also made us very nervous,” says Martha Mogoera, who has been part of the project from its inception and is also its Treasurer. “The NDA explained to us that we would be entering a contract with the Agency, and that we would be held responsible if any of the money provided was misspent.”

Mapule explains that they were concerned about their lack of formal business experience. “What if we paid too much for something, or purchased equipment that was not really suitable for our activities? We didn’t want to let the NDA or the project down.”

Martha points out that their fears were laid to rest by the training they received from the NDA. “We received financial management training, and learnt how to evaluate suppliers and market our products. In the beginning, we also received a lot of support and guidance from the NDA, which made things easier.”

With the NDA’s help, the project moved from Mapule’s backyard into a new building, which – almost a decade after its construction – is spotlessly clean and carefully maintained. The NDA’s support also helped them acquire industrial sewing machines and embroidery equipment, purchase a printing machine, and buy a vehicle for the collection of materials and deliveries.

The project also shifted its focus towards the production of school clothing to cater for the surrounding community, and expanded into the production and provision of fruit juices. These two product lines are well supported by the community, with learners from the Madibogo and Utlwanang High Schools, and from the Madisepo and Mtsitlane Primary Schools, purchasing uniforms from the project. The Department of Social Development also purchases uniforms for needy and orphaned learners.

"We have always had very good support from the community and we are thankful for this. The Department of Social Development has also been supportive; whenever they host events that call for catering, they approach us to provide fruit juices," states Mapule.

While the project has enjoyed steady growth over the past 12 years, it has not been without its challenges. In the beginning, more than 40 individuals were involved in the project, but this number has since decreased to nine – seven women and two men.

"People are eager to earn a fixed salary, but it is not possible with the type of work we do. Some months are good, but other months less so. You have to be prepared to save for the times when there is little to go around, and not everyone can do this," shares Mapule.

She is also happy that some of the women who were trained at the project have been able to start their own businesses to support themselves and their families.

Martha notes that the project has paid a lot of attention to ensuring it produces quality products. "Before returning to Madibogo to start the project, Mapule was working at a company where she learnt how to produce chemical cleaning agents, and we have benefitted from this knowledge," she says. "The local government departments and schools purchase our cleaning agents because they find it to be of good quality and at a reasonable price."

However, growing beyond the border of its local market is proving a challenge for the Tshwaraganang Barolong Project, and distribution agreements that will see its products reach a larger market would be a big boon for it.

"We are also constantly looking at upgrading our skills. For example, the digital design work that goes into creating a logo that can be used on the embroidery machine is something we still have to ask others to do," says Mapule. "We see opportunities in this market and would like to be in a position where we can do this work ourselves and take advantage of other features that the equipment offers."

Although she believes that by the end of this decade she will have retired, Mapule is adamant that she will not leave the Tshwaraganang Barolong Project until her dream of establishing a large factory has been realised. She envisions a facility where separate production units manufacture clothing, cleaning agents, food stuffs and knitwear – supported by a shared administrative centre.

Ever the visionary leader, Mapule makes it known that her plans for the future revolve around the creation of sustainable opportunities for young people in her community. "Government has done a lot to develop our community, and we now have schools and access to health services and other benefits. Yet, the one thing that is still lacking is the chance to earn a living, and this makes many young people despair. I know that if we can expand our project we can make a difference in the lives of our youth, and I will spend all my time working towards this goal."

Skills Transfer

Assisting other community-based organisations has been one of the focus points for Mapule. "We have learnt so much – from practical skills that the Department of Labour taught us, to business skills that the NDA assisted us with," she relates. "A number of women who worked at the project have already gone out on their own, and this shows that the skills we have



to share are valuable and can change lives. It made sense to me that we share this knowledge in order to help others."

Mapule took the Tshwaraganang Disabled Project, which assists children, under her wing and helped with the necessary skills and material to produce shawls and cell phone covers that are sold to generate additional income. She also put her knowledge of creating a business plan to good use when the project needed additional structures to house the children.

"I was able to assist them with a proposal for the Department of Social Development, which helped them with new structures and equipment. They still have a number of challenges, the biggest being the need for a vehicle that can help collect the children from their homes and take them to the school. As they care for 35 children, it is not always easy to coordinate transport services with independent suppliers."

The Tlhabolagang Food Plot has also benefitted from the assistance of the Tshwaraganang Barolong Project. They needed to improve their business skills, and the project assisted by helping them develop income and expenditure guidelines for their activities. The South African National Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition further assisted by providing practical training, and the Tlhabolagang Food Plot is currently going from strength to strength.

A Holistic Approach

Zodwa Douse is adamant that the notion of failure is something that is given too much prominence in our daily lives. “Nobody sets out to fail. When something is not working or plans don’t turn into the reality we hoped for, we are quick to label ourselves as failures,” she opines. “One needs to see problems in the right light. Problems are feedback, and if your mind-set is correct, they present you with an important learning opportunity.”

In her 17 years at the Klein Karoo Resource Centre, she has had her fair share of challenges, but has spent her time focusing on the positive learning experience these have brought her. In many respects, this commitment to learning is fitting, because the Klein Karoo Resource Centre, where she serves as Training Manager, is focused on the development of early childhood developers. Ultimately, the teachers who pass through this centre will be responsible for placing the children in their care on a path of lifelong learning.

While the centre, which celebrates its 20th anniversary next year, focuses primarily on servicing the Southern Cape, Klein and Groot Karoo regions, it welcomes candidates from all over the country. The calibre of the centre’s work is widely recognised as being very good and, to allow for the expansion of its methodologies into other regions, the centre offers a train-the-trainer programme. “This specific programme has been doing exceptionally well. It has even reached Nkandla, the home village of President Jacob Zuma,” notes a proud Zodwa.

Candidates who pass through the centre’s doors emerge with qualifications that are National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 4 accredited. In the case of the higher certificate in early childhood development (ECD) it is NQF Level 5. The centre is also able to provide training towards a National Diploma in ECD.

“Our training is becoming increasingly important in the light of the Department of Social Development’s move to register not only crèches but also the specific programmes they are offering,” reveals Zodwa. “It is critical for crèches to have the right training in place for their developers if they want to make the most of the available benefits.”

The centre’s approach relies heavily on close involvement between the teachers, the parents and the crèche’s management. In this manner, parents are always aware of the develop-

mental milestones their children have reached, and what role they can play in assisting the children in their development. “It is very important that holistic development takes place. Both cognitive and physical aspects are important, and we emphasise this in our ECD training,” asserts Zodwa.

Through the close relationship the centre has with the communities it serves and the 50 crèches it has helped start, it became apparent that the many crèches could benefit from having a steady supply of fresh vegetables to give to the children in their care.

After considering how it could contribute to meeting this challenge, the centre decided to adopt a permaculture approach to the establishment of food gardens. According to Zodwa, the centre decided to utilise this approach because it is ecologically sustainable in the long term. “The fact that it uses small areas in an efficient manner, thereby securing sustainable and efficient food production, is something that appealed to us,” says Zodwa. “It also made a lot of sense to the National Development Agency (NDA), and this is the reason why it gave its support.”

The approach adopted by the centre to permaculture is widely known as the ‘circle’ approach. The centre adopted this method because it requires fewer pathways than rectangular beds of the same area, and several areas can be accessed from one spot to allow for weeding and planting.

In keeping with the centre’s practice of a holistic approach, the gardener and the ECD manager who have been trained in the permaculture techniques have a responsibility to train a member of the community in permaculture activities. “Ideally, this should be one of the parents from the school. This allows for a joint effort between the parent and the school in securing food for the children, which has a positive impact on the community in general,” relates Zodwa.

The centre provides complete training for those crèches that want to start the programme. This includes theoretical training at the centre, and then assisting participants with the establishment of their permaculture garden, right up to the planting of the first seeds.

“The permaculture project has been a perfect addition to support what we are trying to give young children through our ECD training programme,” asserts Zodwa. “We believe very strongly that quality education should not be restricted through limited resources, and for crèches that become involved in this programme, things become just a little easier.”

The Klein Karoo Resource Centre has already left a permanent mark on the development landscape through the 300 to 350 early childhood developers it has trained per year since inception. A number of individual developers and schools that the centre has been involved in training have also received recognition for their efforts, thereby continuing and expanding the centre’s legacy of providing each child with the best possible start to life.





FOOD SECURITY



Reaping Rewards

Moses Motlhamme is part-agriculturalist, part-project-manager and part-fundraiser, but he assures me that his oranges are completely delicious. "Our produce is 100% sweet. If you don't believe me, taste for yourself," he says. I do, and Moses is right – these are oranges like no other.

Moses is Project Manager of the Winterveldt Citrus Project, which is located in the mostly rural Winterveldt area in Gauteng, about 40km from Pretoria. He beams as he meanders through row upon row of trees that are heavy with fruit, stroking them almost the way a father would his first-born child.

"We currently have about 20 000 orange trees, but some of them need to be replanted because of frost we have had over the past few years. The frost has been devastating, but we have heard that watering trees regularly during the winter months creates a type of buffer against the cold, so we will be looking into this going forward," says Moses.

Using water to combat frost may seem a creative way of farming, but then again there is nothing dull or ordinary about the formation of the Winterveldt Citrus Project. A few years ago, businessperson, agriculturalist and local resident, Dr Sam Motseuanyane, realised that the land in the Winterveldt area was being underutilised. Having been earmarked as territory for the 'homelands' during apartheid, locals had been using the land for generations, but mostly for subsistence farming.

Following consultation with Dr Motseuanyane, officials from the Department of Agriculture and a group of plot-owners in the area, the community then launched the Winterveldt United Farmers Association (WUFA) in an attempt to coordinate farming activities. One of its initiatives is the Winterveldt Citrus Project, which was launched in 2002.

"When the project began, the idea was that we would cultivate citrus trees that we would then sell to plot-owners in the community in an attempt to encourage them to undertake larger-scale agricultural activities. In the beginning it was difficult to convince them why citrus is a good investment, since it usually takes around three years before an orange tree bears enough fruit to be sold. However, once they realised how much

a single mature tree can produce per season, they started paying attention," says Moses with a smile.

The project was doing well in terms of cultivating trees, but there was such a need for citrus in the area that the decision was made to purchase additional land and cultivate trees so that the Winterveldt Citrus Project too could sell produce.

However, in order to do this, funding was needed. "Without the National Development Agency (NDA), there would be no Winterveldt Citrus Project to speak of. It supplied a total of over R1.5-million that was used for debushing the area, purchasing irrigation pipes and razor-wire fencing, constructing a packing house, and buying machinery such as a tractor, slasher and ploughs. The NDA's support turned this into a commercial operation," explains Moses.

The results have been impressive. The first harvest produced 3 ton of oranges, and a year later this figure had almost quadrupled to 11 ton. Just before the frost, the project was producing over 100 ton per season. The Winterveldt Citrus Project currently supplies to large retailers in the surrounding area, as well as to the Johannesburg and Pretoria fresh produce markets. "The quality of our produce is so high that some of the businesses we supply to, like orange juice-producer Magalies Citrus, are happy to take as much of our oranges as we can supply," says Moses.

And herein lies the challenge for the Winterveldt Citrus Project. "The demand is there in the market, and we have been very lucky to have access to the market. However, there is no way we can meet the demand, since a lot of the land owned by members of WUFA is still not being fully utilised. Plot-owners need assistance with aspects such as electricity, watering systems, the purchasing of diesel and workers' salaries. If we can find a way to support them in these matters, the potential is massive."

However, despite the fact that there is still a long way to go, community members have reaped major rewards from the Winterveldt Citrus Project. Plot-owners have been given the tools to move from subsistence to more commercial-style farming, and the Winterveldt Citrus Project also provides employment opportunities to locals. "We only have around five permanent workers here, but during the harvest we employ up to 20 casual workers."

In total, Moses estimates that around 70 local plot-owners benefit from the project, meaning food and job opportunities for 70 households. "In addition, 5% of the proceeds of the sale of the oranges goes back to WUFA itself, so we know that we are contributing to even further collaboration between plot-owners in the area. We also provide free washing, drying and packing services to WUFA members, using the equipment financed by the NDA, of course," says Moses with a smile.

Hatching a great future

Kabelo Leepile, one of the beneficiaries of the Brandfort and Wayawayaya Poultry Projects, awaits me as I drive onto the premises, and I must admit that it is good to see not only the chicken runs but also the vegetable garden adjacent to the offices.

The project was launched in 1998 when 17 people joined hands to form a poultry project. Of the 17 original beneficiaries, nine are still actively involved on a day-to-day basis. The project really got going after the Masilonyana Local Municipality gave the project a substantial grant. Wayawayaya also received a grant in 2005 from the Community Projects Fund of the Department of Agriculture.

As this type of project is a capital-intensive programme, the National Development Agency (NDA) also got involved in 2009 with a substantial grant that made it possible to install a third row of layers for housing chickens, thus allowing for an increase in the number of chickens. The NDA further helped with the purchasing of the expensive storage facility for the chicken feed.

"With this newly installed equipment and a larger number of chickens, we now deliver 55 000 to 75 000 eggs per week to Alzaar Poultry, which is our partner in selling the eggs," says Kabelo.

Since Wayawayaya is a community-based project, the beneficiaries are proud of the fact that they can use their profits to contribute to the local community. They therefore provide eggs, vegetables, school clothes and shoes to the local community orphanage, poor families and the local school. "We also employ people from the community to help with the tasks of the poultry farm and for the vegetable garden," says Kabelo.

This has not only helped local community members earn a living, but you can also see that they are proud to put food on the table for their families. All beneficiaries are also actively involved in running the facility.

"Our only real challenge is that the chickens we have purchased from the Cape are dying due to the climate differences, and there is nothing we can do about it. We have lost a substantial number of chickens, and this negatively affects our production. The cost of layer hens is also very expensive, and therefore recouping the costs is a slow process," explains Kabelo.

Kabelo also explains that it is expensive to extend the project's operations, and this hampers the potential future success of the initiative. "To grow without any further financial assistance will take much longer, but since we are dedicated and passionate about our project, we will find a way to make it work and grow the project," says Kabelo.

"Our vision for the future is to expand the project and thereby create more jobs for our community. We also aim to become financially independent. Our vegetable garden is an important part of our objective to become a fully-fledged business, as we use the manure from the chickens to fertilise the gardens.

"We have made a positive impact on the community, and this was made possible through the NDA, without whose help



and grants the project would not have grown into a successful business where we can help the community, orphanage and school children."

Kabelo explains that those involved in the Brandfort and Wayawayaya Poultry Projects have become professional business-people through the NDA's help, and beneficiaries also understand that the aim of the business is to help empower other community members by giving them a chance to become proud people.

This sentiment was confirmed by two of the employees of Wayawayaya who sat in on the interview. When asked what their viewpoints are, they both said: "We are very grateful as we have become dignified and are now able to support our families. We have also learned new skills."

Market - Maker

Prominently situated on a busy thoroughfare in the centre of Pietermaritzburg, the Newport Fresh Produce Market benefits from the bustling commuter trade in and around its location.

In many respects, New Port represents a new era in the funding approach adopted by the National Development Agency (NDA). It is a unique project in that, for the first time, the Agency has funded a project aimed at building a retail base and establishing its brand in the highly competitive commercial marketplace.

"I must confess that I was quite sceptical when I approached the NDA," acknowledges Muhle Sibisi, founding member and Chairperson of the cooperative. "I had my doubts about its willingness to put funds behind an idea that would push the boundaries of what has become known as 'acceptable' projects to fund."

Despite his reservations, and with the encouragement of a local NDA representative, he approached the Agency. His idea, which he admits had been germinating in his mind since childhood, was to open up direct and easy access for emerging farmers to urban markets.

"I grew up in a rural area, and as is common practice in such an environment I spent a lot of time working the soil and raising crops in conjunction with my family. I always knew that our produce carried commercial value, but there never seemed to be an effective way of unlocking this potential."

Whilst attending a function at which KwaZulu-Natal Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, placed emphasis on the formation of farming cooperatives and urged everyone to assist these emerging farmers, Muhle decided that the time had come to start putting action behind his dream.

Since 2000, he had been active in the informal trading of produce and had gained a good understanding of the challenges that were prevalent in this sector. By the time he approached the NDA with his plan to create a fresh produce market that would focus on being an outlet for all the emerging farmers in the region, he was quite confident that his venture would be a commercial success.

His experience, business plan and the thorough manner in which he dealt with all the details, along with his experience in the market, were all factors that convinced the NDA that this 'new' approach was worthy of funding. The Agency assisted him in fitting the market with all the necessary equipment, and in October 2010 New Port opened its doors for the first time. "Full-blown commercial enterprises are expensive to get off the ground, and the grant was a sizable R3.5-million," reveals Muhle.

To his credit, the market has been a great success – even an outstanding funding tranche has not broken its growth stride. "There is still about R300 000 that is outstanding, but this does not pose a problem for us as we are on a sound footing and generate enough to keep us going."

It has also been a huge positive for emerging farmers in the region, who now find a ready market for their produce. According



to Muhle, for many of the emerging farmers the market provides an introduction into the rigours of the free-market system.

"I know that the NDA makes a substantial effort towards ensuring that farmers have a good understanding of financial controls and input costs. However, it's only when they deal with the realities of having a crop in the field, tallying all the input costs at harvest time and negotiating with buyers that a new learning curve opens up for them," he shares.

He admits that a number of emerging farmers harbour unrealistic price expectations, and that he often spends some time with them during price negotiations to explain the impact of energy costs and how the prevailing market price influences what he can offer them for their produce.

"We always find a happy medium in terms of price, and I also use the opportunity to advise them on packaging techniques for their produce, since how you display your products makes a big difference to consumers.

"One of the challenges I am experiencing revolves around the regularity of supply. I always encourage the farmers to have a crop in the field, since this gives them the opportunity to take advantage of good market prices while riding out the dips."

Muhle has big plans for the future. He is already negotiating with the owners of the building situated at the back of the market to secure a lease for these premises. He intends opening up a wholesale market in this space, catering for vendors and other bulk buyers.

He notes that in the northern regions of KwaZulu-Natal, many vendors and traders think nothing of driving to the municipal market in Durban to acquire produce. "This makes no sense, but they do it because they don't have municipal markets in their towns. I believe we can successfully take the New Port brand into these regions and kick-start the wholesale side of our business in a big way." This expansion will create additional employment opportunities, and Muhle could add to the 19 people already employed at the market.

"One of the key challenges I am going to have to overcome first is raising the finance to expand my fleet. Ideally, I need a fleet of 1-ton commercial vehicles and three more trucks. If I can get these, we can collect and get produce to the market faster. It will also facilitate our expansion drive." Considering the track record he has for innovation and overcoming obstacles, there are few people who would bet against him making this a reality.

New Port Brings New Hope

The Newport Fresh Produce Market is an NDA initiative aimed at assisting small farmers from the KwaZulu-Natal midlands in bringing their produce to a relevant market. The market was initiated by an NDA grant of R3.5-million and has had an incredibly positive impact on the local community, as these small farm owners attest.

Access to Markets

Under the stewardship of Mrs Moelefe, BBS Farm has grown from strength to strength, producing tomatoes, beans and macadamias. BBS Farm had a wealth of produce but lacked a sufficient market to sell to. "The Newport Fresh Produce Market has really helped us to grow exponentially. Representatives from the market buy all the produce we are able to generate, collect it themselves and pay us when they say they will," she says.

With regard to nonmonetary aid, Mrs Moelefe states: "Before, we struggled with marketing our products, having enough manpower to really capitalise on our harvest, and having the correct documentation on hand – all facets with which the NDA has helped us through training in these core activities."

Food for Thought

Nxolisi, owner and chief operator of Rainbow Mission Farm, is delighted with the opportunity that New Port has brought. "Apart from purchasing all the beetroots and carrots we are able to produce, the market has opened our eyes to new and exciting avenues we had not considered before.

"Through our meetings with the market's representatives, we have been told that by producing other produce that falls in different cycles than our main produce – such as spinach and paprika – we will be able to substantially supplement our revenue streams, as these are highly sought-after products."

The positive outcomes of this project are not only found on the farm but in the surrounding communities too. "Apart from the fact that the Newport Fresh Produce Market employs local people and therefore creates job opportunities, the market is also – and this is very important – giving hope of a brighter tomorrow to all members of the surrounding communities," says Nxolisi.

Motivation for a Brighter Future

Through their ability to bring their products to market, coupled with effective cost savings, Thuli, the Operations Manager at Coastal Cashews, sees sustainable growth for the future. "In these harsh economic times, one cannot afford to carry excessive expenses whilst not reaching expected sales. The Newport Fresh Produce Market has been instrumental in enabling Coastal Cashews to remain competitive through purchasing everything we are able to produce, and taking collection upon themselves, thus minimising our expenses in terms of distribution."

Looking towards the future, Thuli says: "We are looking forward to expanding our pineapple production, not only to increase sales but also to get more members of our community involved and employed."

Supporting Growth

From the outset, the NDA has been there to help and assist new farming ventures, as Mr Moloï from the Agri Cooperative states. "Without prior knowledge of the supporting activities required to run a successful business, we were cautious and a bit hesitant. But through training programmes provided to us by the NDA on financial management, business management and dispute resolution, we have become much more confident in our ability to make a lasting change."

In terms of community upliftment, Mr Moloï states: "All the community members see the successes we are achieving, and it is motivating them to achieve their personal goals, and showing them that they can do and achieve anything if they are willing to work for it and if they want it badly enough."

Something to Crow About

For many South Africans, the sound of chickens clucking stirs up memories of simpler times in their youth. However, for a group of formerly unemployed teachers from Malamulela in Limpopo, it represents a steady income and food on their tables.

With the concept of cooperatives becoming a government priority in the early 2000s, the Department of Local Economic Development embarked on a campaign to encourage communities to form cooperatives, and the Mahonisi community was one of them. A group of Mahonisi community members, most of whom had teaching diplomas, decided to take their futures into their own hands, and so the Sasekisani Primary Cooperative was born.

Violet Mabasa, one of the founding members and Chairperson of Sasekisani, says that starting a business can be very difficult but, with the help of others, anything is possible. The business started small in 2003, thanks to a donation of a few chickens by the Department of Agriculture, while the cooperative members personally financed 116 chicken layers. The local chief was kind enough to provide Sasekisani with 18 hectares of land to operate from.

The business was then registered as a cooperative in 2004 with the help of the National Cooperative Association of South Africa. Thanks to a grant from the Limpopo Business Support Agency, the cooperative was able to pay for chicken coops, electricity, fencing and a borehole. Thereafter, the Department of Trade and Industry gave the cooperative a grant that was used to buy a computer, fridge and cabinets. The Thulamela Local Municipality even helped the cooperative to build a much-needed storeroom.

While the business was steadily growing, it was still battling to make ends meet. An injection from the National Development Agency (NDA) in 2010 helped Sasekisani to grow even faster and achieve more than it could ever have imagined. The NDA granted the cooperative just over R1.7-million to increase the number of chickens and expand its infrastructure. With the money, Sasekisani paid salaries, bought vital equipment like a 10-ton delivery truck and office equipment, and built an office and ablution block.

Today, Sasekisani has 23 staff members and nearly 20 000 chickens that produce 16 000 eggs daily. The quality of the cooperative's systems and produce has enabled it to get the stamp of approval from the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) Quality Management Systems. SAS Eggs, as the cooperative is now marketing itself, is on a mission to supply its customers with healthy, high-quality, free-range eggs and vegetable products at affordable rates on a daily basis.

According to Joseph Khosa, General Manager of the cooperative, business has been booming as it has business agreements in place with all the supermarkets in and around Malamulela, and with major supermarkets as far afield as Thohoyandou, including Pick n Pay and Friendly Supermarket. "None of this was



going to be possible without the NDA funding," he says. However, the NDA did more than just provide funding; it also offered training to the cooperative members to help them manage their books, develop a proper filing system and market their products.

Thanks to this funding and training, the cooperative's continued sustainability came to the attention of Old Mutual's Masisizane Fund, which recently granted Sasekisani a loan of R1.7-million to help the enterprising cooperative expand its business even further to satisfy an ever-growing market. With this money, it was able to erect a chicken house for another 12 000 chicks and buy another 12 000 hens.

This is just another increasingly sustainable business that is resulting in the improvement of the lives of many community members touched by the project, thanks to the foresight of the NDA.

From Grootvlei to the United States

It's not often one sees individuals tackling a project as comprehensive as food production, and this is what makes the successes of the Mphatlalatsane Cooking Oil Co-operative Limited that much more outstanding. In 2003, the Department of Social Development asked locals to come up with projects that would be beneficial to the community of Grootvlei, but Mphatlalatsane has had unprecedented success.

With the initial grant given by the Department of Social Development, the wheels started rolling in 2005/2006 when Mphatlalatsane was registered, and then its 15 members began producing cooking oil in all earnest.

Mphatlalatsane made a request for assistance to the National Development Agency (NDA), and the request was approved. The grant made it possible for the cooperative to purchase a much-needed 4.6-ton truck and 50-ton storage facility, and to obtain sunflowers for the production of the pure sunflower oil. In order to be able to deal with the requirements of businesses, 10% of the grant was used to train the beneficiaries in finance administration, marketing, corporate governance and other related business matters.

Mphatlalatsane is committed to the excellence of its product, and the fact that it has obtained every ISO certification right up to ISO 22000 is proof thereof. The cooperative has also complied with every relevant department's requirements for the highest standards, and currently awaits its internationally acclaimed free accreditation, or FLO-CERT from the United States.

Its product, Naledi cooking oil, is distributed to local spaza shops, traders and bed-and-breakfast institutions. It has also acquired an export licence and is being inundated with requests to export to numerous countries. Naledi is cholesterol-free and contains no chemicals, and there are also additional by-products that are sold to the community, such as animal cake from the sunflower residue and chicken feed.

However, the cooperative did face some challenges in terms of reaching the high level of quality demanded of international standards, but the ISO 22000 certification is proof that such challenges have been overcome. The current challenge is to increase capacity so that the cooperative is able to meet the growing demand. If this can be achieved, the local community will be able to reap the full rewards of employment, and will be even prouder of what the cooperative has achieved.

Staff at the Mphatlalatsane Cooking Oil Co-operative Limited are extremely grateful to the NDA for the pivotal role it has played in making their dreams come true, and for giving them a chance to prove that they could make a success of the project. They firmly believe that, without the NDA, they would never have been able to become successful.

Grape Success

Albie Adams laughs heartily when I suggest that he must possess finely honed conflict resolution skills. My observation is made in light of the fact that he has just informed me that the Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative has 80 raisin-producing members and 33 members who are not yet active producers. “Yes, we do have different views about how to deal with challenges. However, dialogue is a positive thing and we have structures in place to make sure everyone is heard,” he says.

As Chairperson of the cooperative, he heads up a five-member Board that meets on a monthly basis. Quarterly meetings are also held with all the cooperative members, and in this manner there is ample opportunity for challenges to be addressed.

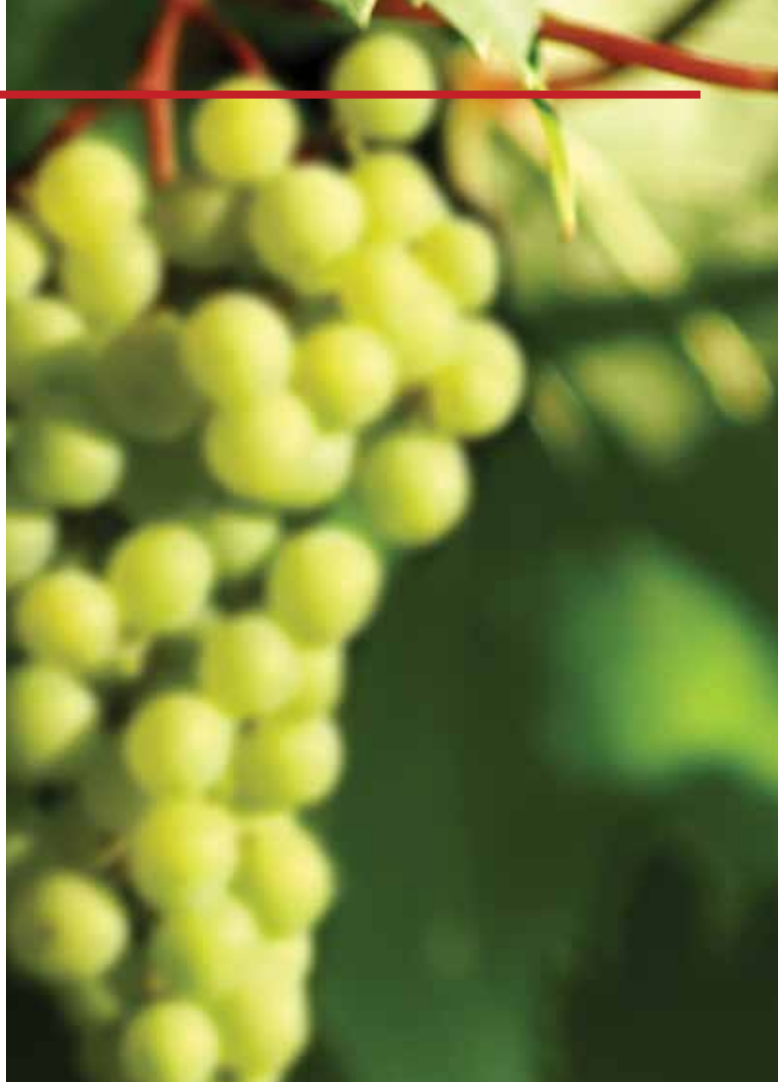
Eksteenskuil is a rural settlement on the lower Orange River Valley outside Keimoes (approximately 45km from Upington) in the Northern Cape Province. The Eksteenskuil Farmers’ Association (EFA) was established in 1994 to contribute to the social and economic upliftment of the historically disadvantaged small-scale irrigation farmers in the region.

In 1995, the EFA facilitated the export of raisins produced by its members to fair trade markets in Europe. In 2003, it obtained fair trade accreditation, or FLO-CERT, which created the opportunity for the organisation to generate much-needed income in the form of a premium paid by the buyers to the community.

In 2006, the members of the EFA recognised that the EFA’s legal status as an association was making it difficult to participate in the market and value chain. After investigating various legal entities, and following a comprehensive consultative process, the Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative was registered. A decision was taken to dissolve the EFA on 30 September 2007, and thereafter the assets of the Association were handed over to the cooperative.

It has been a long journey for everyone involved, and the focus at present is to increase the production capacity of the farmers in the cooperative. Albie explains that many of the farmers have small-scale operations of 3 to 4 hectares. The size of their facilities limits their ability to expand drying areas, which is a critical element in raisin production.

“Space is one challenge, but we can possibly overcome this by setting up shared facilities in the town that farmers can rent when they need it,” suggests Albie. “The real problem is the cost of these facilities, whether it is cement slabs or drying





racks. The cost of producing them has increased significantly in recent times, and it will be a careful financial balancing act that we will need to undertake in order to make this a reality.”

At present, the cooperative has a centralised implement facility where farmers can hire equipment at a minimum cost. This pool of equipment has played a big role in helping the farmers lift their production efficiency.

However, the reality is that wringing maximum efficiency out of the vineyards can only take farmers so far. “About 50% of the vineyards for raisin production in the lower Orange River are 20 years old. This constitutes a real problem because when these vineyards were planted, contemporary soil preparation techniques and planting procedures were not yet used. This means that older vineyards can sometimes produce as much as 20% to 30% less than new vineyards,” discloses Albie.

In this respect, the funding the cooperative received from the National Development Agency (NDA) has played a big role in opening up new opportunities for the farmers. In 2010, the Agency provided funding to allow the farmers to start planting new vineyards that will allow them to provide grapes for the wine and fruit juice markets.

Despite floods in the region soon after the planting of the new vineyards, which necessitated some re-establishment of the vineyards, they are expected to start producing significant capacity in 2013. “These vineyards are going to make quite a difference. They will allow farmers to switch between drying grapes for raisins and harvesting grapes for wine production, thereby affording them the opportunity to better balance their production,” says Albie.

At present, things are looking promising for the cooperative, and in the current year it has produced 240 tons of raisins and some 51 tons of sultanas. The increase in demand from Muslim countries during periods such as Ramadan has seen prices increase for sultanas, and it is now a potentially lucrative option for the farmers.

The cooperative has also concluded agreements with Safari and RedSun Raisins, which offer farmers reasonable prices for their raisins depending on the grade the farmers deliver. “We negotiated these agreements in order to give farmers an opportunity to deliver to more than one buyer. To a certain degree, this gives freedom of choice to the farmer,” states Albie.

Looking ahead, there are good opportunities for the cooperative. Once the vineyards that produce grapes for the wine industry reach full capacity, the potential exists for the cooperative to start dealing directly with wine producers. The increased interest in healthy lifestyles across the world also bodes well for the industry in general.

“We are not without our challenges, but I think we are certainly on the right path. The market is gradually opening up for us, and if we ensure that we are ready to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead, we will be able to continue building on our success,” concludes Albie.



Food Secures a Future

“We can’t rely on grants for our survival. The government is under a lot of pressure to support the needy, and the world economy has taken a turn for the worse. It is more important than ever that we all do our part to become self-supporting.”

Roset Nyembe shares this cautionary view with me as she takes me on a guided tour of the hydroponic system that is used by Zigna Home Based Care to grow a variety of vegetables that are supplied to the surrounding community.

As one of the founding members of this community-based organisation, Roset is delighted with the strong growth it has shown since its inception in 1999. “Things did not always go our way but we persevered, and today many funding institutions recognise the fact that we always work hard at delivering on the commitments we make.”

According to Project Coordinator Aubrey Masinga, the original intention was to give away all the produce grown by the community-based organisation. “There are many ill people and orphans who are in need of fresh vegetables in their diet,” he explains. The project also plays an important role in the lives of those children who find themselves in the unfortunate position of being the head of a household.

“Often, these children don’t know anything about the importance of a balanced diet. Providing soup is not enough; growing children need the vitamins that vegetables provide. At present, we are assisting 16 child-headed households and we really make a concerted effort to ensure that they have enough foodstuffs. Where necessary, we also buy additional food items for them,” shares Roset.

The operational costs involved in keeping the hydroponics system in peak condition has necessitated the conclusion of a commercial contract with a local supermarket, which purchases vegetables from the project on a regular basis. The money from these sales is used to buy chemicals and other nutrients that help keep the hydroponic growth environment intact.

“The Department of Social Development also has a contract with us for the purchase of vegetables. Unfortunately, bureaucratic processes can sometimes lead to a delay in payments,” says Aubrey. “This is where the commercial agreement we have with the supermarket often makes a big difference.”

The project enjoyed a big break in 2006 when the European Union, in conjunction with the Department of Health, began making a significant contribution to the monthly stipends that are paid to the project’s caregivers.

“We have 48 people working at the project. Of these, 40 are home-based caregivers who visit sick people and orphans, and who not only provide physical care but also assist with house-

hold chores. They also distribute the produce that we grow, such as spinach, beetroot and onions,” shares Aubrey. “These caregivers work on a rotational basis. When they are not attending to those in need, they work in the garden.”

The National Development Agency (NDA) became involved in 2008 when Zigna Home Based Care approached it for assistance, based on the Agency’s willingness to assist agricultural projects aimed at providing food security at community and household level.

“The NDA’s support meant a lot to us because it helped us increase the self-sufficiency of the project. It also has important spin-offs in that unemployed youth can spend time at the project and in this manner start gaining work experience that they can include on their CVs. This can be particularly advantageous when a young person is seeking employment in an environment that is focused on agricultural production,” says Roset.

Finding ways to equip people with marketable job skills occupies a lot of Roset’s time. In her opinion, there are large numbers of people aged between 23 and 40 who urgently need assistance. These people need to be taught skills in order for them to be able to find meaningful work.

“Many people in this age group did not finish school and it is common for them to have an education level of Grade 10 or lower. They can really benefit from learning basic skills such as the proper way to plant, tend for and then harvest crops,” she maintains.

While the project’s main focus at start-up was food security, it has over the years expanded its services to include auxiliary social services such as counselling and programmes aimed at counteracting gender-based violence.

Ben Sibuyi, a volunteer counsellor at the project, is involved with developing programmes aimed at educating the youth. “We take these programmes to the various schools in the vicinity and help raise awareness amongst the youth with respect to the challenges many of them face. We also share ideas with them in terms of how they can deal with these challenges.”

Ben has been involved with the project for a little over three years and enjoys the work he is doing. “You have to be prepared to help out wherever the need exists, and some days I simply work in the vegetable garden because that is where my assistance is most needed.”

Aubrey confirms that it is this type of willingness to serve the community wherever it is needed that has been one of the key pillars of the project’s success. “We have limited work opportunities available and we cannot afford to richly reward those who join us. Yet, we have found that the people who have joined us have always been eager to contribute as much as they possibly can.”

Roset is set to continue this approach and already has her eye on expanding the project, thereby being able to plough more back into the community. “Ideally, I want a 100-hectare farm on which we can grow maize that can be distributed to the needy. Not only will this contribute greatly to food security, but it will also assist me in reaching my objective of giving 500 people work through our project. I know it is ambitious, but it is a dream I believe we can realise.”

CAPACITY BUILDING



Opportunity Mushrooms in Dunoon

A mushroom-growing project has done much to empower Dunoon community members by helping them practice containerised mushroom-growing, and spawning their business and marketing skills.

A grant from the National Development Agency (NDA) has changed the lives of several residents in Dunoon Township, located in Table View just outside of Cape Town. The township is home to about 15 000 people, most of whom depend on social grants from government in order to feed themselves and look after their families.

In 2007, the community came to the attention of Catholic Welfare and Development (CWD), one of South Africa's oldest nongovernmental organisations. CWD decided to launch a project whereby community members could get involved in growing, packaging and selling mushrooms.

It partnered with African Gourmet Mushrooms, a company that grows exotic mushrooms for the South African and international market, for the technical expertise necessary to help community members grow and market the mushrooms.

CWD also approached the NDA for funding for the entire operation of the Dunoon Mushroom Community Project, as it is now known. Following the successful completion of its assessment process, the NDA was more than happy to assist, extending a grant valued at just over R640 000 to CWD, which is managing the project.

"The project was launched in April 2008 with the full support of community leaders, which is a basic requirement for the success of any community project," says Chance Chagunda, Economic Development Focus Area Manager for CWD. The Jobstart Training Centre – another CWD economic development initiative – also became involved in order to provide training to the project members in all spheres of the business, from containerised mushroom growing, to business and management principles, to marketing and sales skills.

Four years on and the project is producing nearly 100kg of mushrooms each month, which are being sold – at R100 per kilogram – to Shoprite Checkers through African Gourmet Mushrooms. The project now has two containers and a cooler, both of which have facilitated a near doubling of production.

The process of growing mushrooms begins with spawn production in a laboratory, receiving the mature substrate blocks with ready-to-produce mushrooms, and then placing these blocks in a controlled atmosphere container. Currently, the project employs nine community members, one of whom mans the containers and the rest being involved in the production, marketing and sale of the mushrooms.

"The continued production of mushrooms and their supply to various shops and restaurants within Cape Town is one of the greatest achievements of the project. The community has taken ownership of the project, which is one of the reasons for its success. For those directly involved with the project, it represents their livelihood," says Chance.



The Dunoon Mushroom Community Project is also proving a valuable educational tool; the University of Cape Town often takes its agricultural science students on controlled visits to the project to study its impact on the community. "We are also beginning to encourage local and other schools to study the project for practical agricultural purposes," he reveals. All studies have to take into consideration the sensitive process through which mushrooms are grown in containers – letting too much light into the containers at the wrong time could impede the growth of the mushrooms.

Like many community-based projects, there have been some teething problems for the Dunoon Mushroom Community Project. "Initially, the different political factions of the project's Board members resulted in some in-fighting, but this was resolved as a result of a facilitated interaction between them," says Chance.

The plan is that CWD will continue to manage the project until year-end, when it hopes to hand over the reins to the community. "We won't just abandon the Dunoon community though, since we will continue to monitor and mentor the project members for at least another year after handover," he adds.

The project has now entered into its next phase, that of selling directly to customers. With the help of CWD, it has already approached various potential customers, and Chance is hopeful that the Dunoon Mushroom Community Project will soon be able to increase its revenue, thereby making the project even more sustainable.

"Our hopes are that the project will increasingly supply new markets, and that it will shift from being a community project to a viable business entity. For the CWD, the plan is to replicate this project in other communities in need. Without the help of the NDA, there would be no mushroom project – the Agency's funding made possible the existence of this project," he concludes.

Building Communities Together

What a pleasure to spend a morning with three people who are clearly so passionate and enthusiastic about their project. It is all but impossible to capture everything they have to share and what they still want to achieve.

These three people are Director Hubert Von Lindeiner, Programme Coordinator Kenneth Hanong and Field Worker Neo Mabine, who are responsible for the three projects run by Catholic Community Services (CCS) in the Eastern Free State. The projects are MARU (the Maluti Agricultural Research Unit), the Thuthukani Organisational Development Programme and the IMPILO Nutrition Programme.

The MARU garden programme is aimed at alleviating poverty in the Eastern Free State through increasing the food security of people in vulnerable communities. It is of the utmost importance that those in poor areas should be able to establish income-generating agricultural projects that will provide them with sufficient income of at least R1 000 per month so that they can provide for their families.

The main challenge experienced by MARU is typical to small businesses with limited income, namely the high cost of transport, challenges surrounding the marketing and selling of products, and the need for storeroom facilities to keep produce fresh. The main future aim of MARU is to increase its impact, and

to monitor and record its impact on food security in order to develop a baseline study system.

MARU has been very successful in that 32 of the 40 beneficiaries of this project are still actively involved. Also, competitions are run between the five groups that constitute MARU, and one of the groups has already formed a successful micro-agricultural enterprise. Prizes are given to the winners, and they really try their best to excel.

The IMPILO Nutrition Programme started as a charity project but has evolved into an initiative that concentrates on providing meals for primary school children, and developing a relationship with the adults running the centre to become more active with the children. Children are assessed and supported where possible. At present, the volunteer adults are only involved in the food programme and are not yet active with the children.

The vision of IMPILO is that parents should be trained to become skilled, and that they should see their contribution as being valuable. Through their dedication and commitment, they will become eligible for employment and thus become economically self-sufficient.

The training will include numerous facets, such as understanding poverty and development, child development and care, basic counselling skills, conducting home visits and more. Furthermore, it is hoped that the multipurpose centres that will develop on the premises will become self-sufficient centres that are stimulating to children.

The Thuthukani Organisational Development Programme is geared towards training volunteers for IMPILO, and is developing training material in line with set standards for the individual being trained. It further manages the accreditation process and



also markets the training programmes so that an income can be derived by providing training to companies and other projects.

Further funding is needed in order for the three separate projects to be able to function as a unit, and this is why the grants and donations given by beneficiaries are so important. Hubert, Kenneth and Neo explain that the support given by the National Development Agency (NDA) has been instrumental to the existence and successes of the projects.

"It has also helped us to be able to plan for future expansion. We have a number of partners that assist us to develop and to support the communities in the Eastern Free State. Our MARU training has been successful, and MARU is following up on a monthly basis as to the progress made by the groups. In order to increase the quality of our services, MARU prepares comprehensive overviews of the group's achievements and production figures, and the effective annual income per project member is captured," explains Hubert.

The projects each have their own challenges, such as getting electricity, water and marketing. MARU assists with such challenges, and the results have been impressive. The Mahata Mmoho group finally got its own chicken production going and is generating income. A real accolade is the Ikaheng Vaal Dam Project, which entered the District Female Farmer of the Year Competition with its dried fruit and vegetables and won R10 000. The Bonang Lesedi group also won R10 000 in the competition, and received R15 000 in the provincial competition as a runner-up.

MARU has been requested by the Department of Agriculture to nominate candidates for the 2012 Female Farmer of the Year Competition, and has also been asked by development agencies in Kimberley, Keimoes and De Aar to assist with training in organic farming and to establish a community garden in Kuruman.



The IMPILO Nutrition Programme has secured funding for the centres but is working hard to raise more funds in order to be able to feed more than 1 000 children with a daily meal. "We cannot spend more than R1.50 per meal with our current funding, and our aim is to raise this to R2.50 for 1 100 children, once a day. Of our 12 centres, the CCS staff have helped eight of those to have their books audited in order to qualify for application to the National Lottery Development Trust Fund," says Hubert.

When training Board members, participants are encouraged to become more active in the day-to-day activities of their centres, and to assume leadership roles rather than simply managing the centres. The relationship between the centres, churches and schools has therefore improved considerably.

"We are still faced with a number of challenges, and especially the challenge of marketing our group's products so that we can become economically viable. We are far away from big economic areas, and most of our centres do not produce enough to fulfil the needs of the bigger companies, and so their produce is not taken on board. Health issues around storage are also a problem," explains Hubert.

However, the CCS regards these not as problems but as challenges, and staff members believe that as the centres grow and prosper, challenges will disappear as they visualise the future positively, and as their training grows and their modules are accepted by the authorities.

"Our collective vision is to eradicate poverty, strengthen the community and bring about healthy, just and compassionate self-sufficient entrepreneurs who again will grow other small groups to follow in their footsteps," concludes Hubert.



Helping Hands

“Sometimes, all it takes to make a difference is that little bit extra,” So says André Cloete, Project Manager at a nongovernmental organisation in the Western Cape called the Ebenhaezer and Papendorp Information and Development Centre (*Ebenhaezer en Papendorp Inligting en Ontwikkelings Sentrum*, or EPIOS).

EPIOS acts as a resource hub for individuals and community-based organisations (CBOs) in the area and targets those involved in youth development, the empowerment of women and support of the landless. It provides support services such as referrals, networking opportunities, and assistance with the drafting of business plans aimed at obtaining funding.

“It is because of these services we provide to local residents that there was a natural fit between EPIOS and the National Development Agency (NDA),” explains André. “Beneficiaries of NDA grants in this area often need more than funding. They also need general assistance in terms of gaining access to grants, and they need someone to help them with project implementation once their grants are approved.”

Specifically, EPIOS assists beneficiaries in terms of the allocation of funding. André explains that funding from the NDA is usually quite specific in terms of what it can be used for. “We assist beneficiaries to understand which amount of money is intended for which resources. Also, if additional funding is needed on a line item – let’s say, for the purchasing of equipment – we help them to write a motivation for an adjustment.”

EPIOS and the NDA have been working together since 2009 on a number of projects in the fields of agriculture, brick-making, needlework and the making of nappies. The agricultural projects have been running the longest, and it is here that André says the impact of the NDA’s involvement has been most evident.

“We work on four agricultural projects, namely Voortbou Boerdery, Nuwe Stasie Landslide, Nuwe Pos Boerdery and the Olifants Drift Small Farmers’ Association. The beneficiaries of these projects used to be involved only in very small-scale farming, and most of them were farm workers. However, they came together to pool resources and try to increase their skills and production capacity.

“The NDA’s funding has assisted in the purchasing of machinery such as a tractor. Furthermore, most beneficiaries were using traditional water channels for farming, which are extremely vulnerable to weather conditions. The Agency’s assistance has allowed for the establishment of a water pipeline that provides a more constant stream of water,” explains André. In addition, the NDA has provided hands-on training to the beneficiaries, and has also provided a stipend for workers. At present, 69 people are employed on the four agricultural projects.

The success of the projects has been impressive. They are producing a wide variety of vegetables, including pumpkin, butternut, lucerne, beans and tomatoes. Some years the yield has been as big as 40 ton of tomatoes.

“However, there are always challenges. Droughts are common in this area, and there are often changes in the agricultural market that we need to be attuned to. However, we are confident about growing the sustainability of the projects, so we are looking at establishing cooperatives and also at renting larger farms for a longer period of time,” says André.

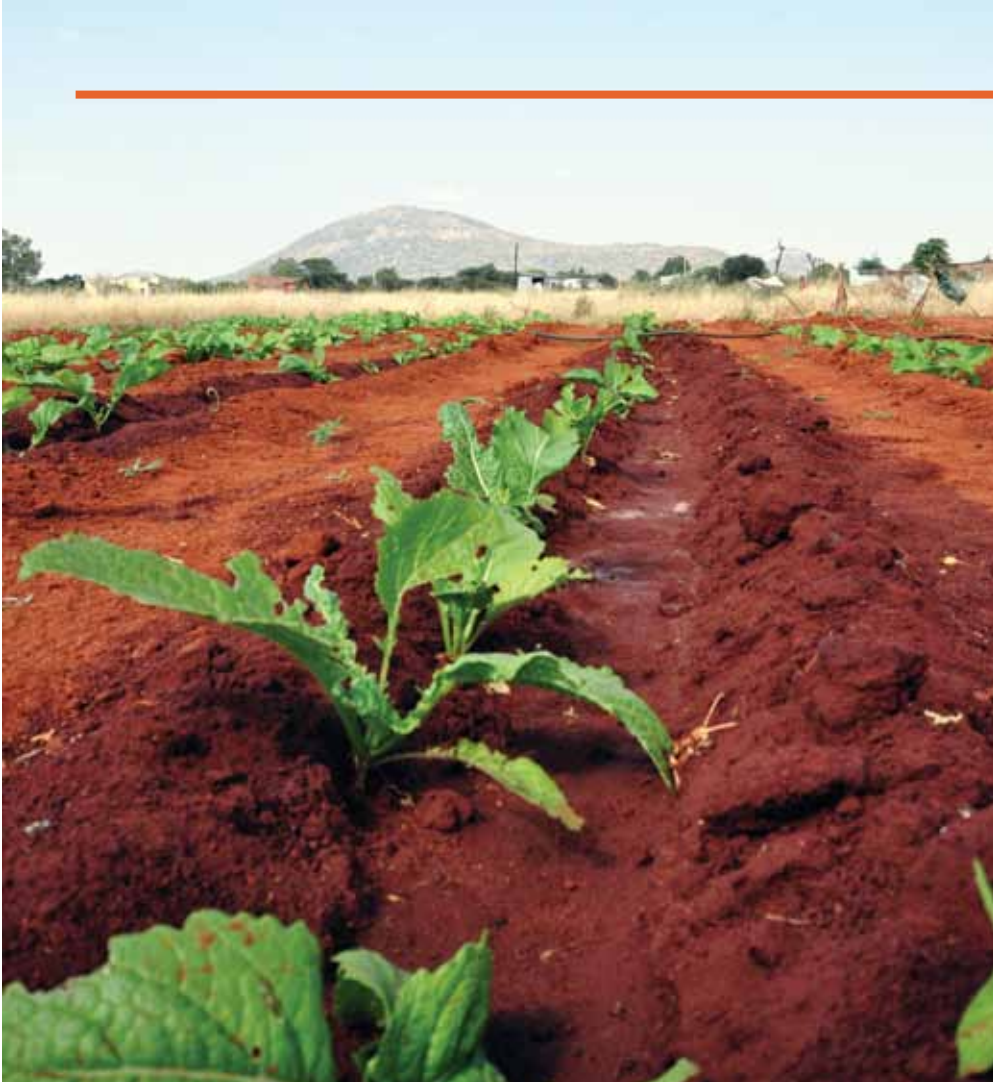
Foundation for Success

EPIOS may be assisting CBOs in its community, but the organisation itself is also a CBO that is worthy of support. For this reason, the NDA enlisted the support of Surplus People Project (SPP), a company that supports and builds grassroots organisations and movements of small-scale farmers, farm dwellers and women in the Western and Northern Cape.

Herschelle Milford, Managing Director of SPP, explains that the company has been involved with EPIOS and the agricultural projects since the inception of the projects. It acts as the conduit of finance from the NDA to the projects, and manages the financial administration, internal audits and drafting of financial statements.

“We also offer organisational support in the form of building EPIOS as a local organisation, and we contribute to aspects such as good practices, ethical leadership and governance,” explains Herschelle. In addition, she explains that SPP offers training on writing proposals, as well as on agriculture-specific issues such as agricultural production, soil fertility and agri-quality.

“It has been extremely rewarding to see how EPIOS has grown as a project management organisation, and how the beneficiaries of the agricultural projects have benefitted in turn. These projects have been very empowering in that they have given local residents an opportunity to build their confidence and morale, and to test their own abilities. The grant from the NDA assisted them to develop their skills and generate income, and this has made all the difference,” she concludes.



A Fragile Existence

The crops are growing strongly and promise to yield an additional source of income for the months ahead, but Grace Maja knows that as the weather becomes colder and is no longer favourable for growing supplemental crops, things will become difficult.

“It can get pretty cold during the winter and we don’t have enough blankets to keep everyone warm,” she sighs. The centre’s building also has no electricity, simply because the electrical supply point just outside the building has not been connected.

“Not only could we keep ourselves warm if we had electricity, but it would also allow us to get a pump for the borehole and start using it to water our vegetable gardens, making it easier for us to expand our gardens and the variety of crops we grow,” she notes.

Grace started the Lesedi Centre for the Mentally Handicapped in 1996 when she noted that mentally handicapped individuals were not adequately catered for within her community. Her compassion and caring nature quickly saw the number of disabled people in her care grow in excess of 30 individuals.

At the start of the new millennium, and with the assistance of a community member, she drafted a business plan and submitted it to the National Development Agency (NDA) for approval.

“In 2002 the NDA approved my request and started building a new centre for us on land donated by one of the community elders,” she states. “The new building put the spotlight on my efforts in assisting the disabled within the community.”

Grace’s reputation for being ‘hands on’ in the provision of care drew disabled people from as far afield as Burgersfort. It also signalled the start of her ongoing battle to secure resources for the centre.

“There was such a need for disabled care that we were quickly swamped. At one point we were caring for more than 30 individuals,” she recounts. “We simply did not have enough food to feed everyone, and people started keeping their disabled family members at home because they realised that we did not have enough capacity.”

These were trying times for Grace. The number of people under the centre’s care dwindled and she struggled to ensure that everyone’s daily nutritional needs were met. Although families often contributed towards the cost of expenses at the centre, these contributions were not enough.

In order to address this challenge, the centre started doing beadwork and manufacturing ashtrays and flower pots from recyclable material. The income from this work, along with the sale of vegetables, is meagre and produces barely enough income to provide for the 10 people currently in the centre’s care.

“There is so much we need, from kitchenware to ablution facilities and a bus to help collect those people who are immobile. We are really becoming desperate, and while we are thankful for all the help we have received, we really need more assistance. If we don’t get it soon, we run the risk of leaving these people destitute.”



Roy Padayachie



Louisa Molema

Lest We Forget

“We have lost a worker, an academic, a cadre and a soldier for a better South Africa. May his family be consoled by the work he has done for the country and its people.” High praise indeed from President Jacob Zuma for the late Public Service and Administration Minister Roy Padayachie, who died in early May 2012 while on an official visit to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.

President Zuma delivered the eulogy for Minister Padayachie on 9 May before the hundreds of people who had gathered at the Sahara Kingsmead Stadium in Durban to pay their last respects to this African National Congress (ANC) stalwart.

While Padayachie will probably be best remembered for successfully serving the Ministry of Communications, both as Deputy Minister and as Minister, it is a little-known fact that he was also instrumental in the establishment of the National Development Agency (NDA). As a trustee of the Transitional National Development Trust, he served on its Audit and Finance Committees and its Policy Advisory Group for the establishment of the NDA in the late 1990s.

In his eulogy, the President praised Padayachie for revitalising the ANC in the 1970s. President Zuma noted that he had known Padayachie since 1974 when he himself was released from Robben Island. “Because he was not outspoken, he did not market himself, [and] many might not have known [him], he just worked,” said the President.

Others who have worked tirelessly towards the success of the NDA and whose passing we mourn include Louisa Molema, Khauhelo Molise and Zanele Makhathini.

Louisa Molema served as a member of the current NDA Board and passed away in 2010. She was an ardent campaigner for the rights of women, being instrumental in launching a number of Women’s Leagues in the North West Province and also being involved in Women Against Community Abuse (WACA), which deals with domestic violence, abused women and children, family disputes, organising child grants, and liaising with the police and courts.

Molema chaired the ANC Women’s League in the North West from 1995 to 1997, served as a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in the North West from 1996 to 1998, and was Chairperson of the Department of Health and Social Development in the North West Legislature.

Khauhelo Molise, who passed away in May 2012, served successfully as Development Manager in the NDA’s Gauteng regional office. Zanele Makhathini is also fondly remembered. She died in 2008, having been responsible for internal communications within the Agency.

Our colleagues died as they lived: in dedicated service to the nation of South Africa, and we salute them. Hamba kahle!

Board Leadership



Mr MF Kekana (Chairperson)



Ms TA Shange (Deputy Chairperson)



Ms B Khan



Mr A Madella



Ms M Malapane



Ms RL Mdhloso



Ms M Monakali



Mr P Thabethe



Rev MO Xundu



Ms S Tolashe

Organisational Structure



*Dr. Vuyelwa Nhlapo
Chief Executive Officer/ex. officio*



*Samuel Lewatle
Executive Director: Human Resources*



*Lunga Mangcu
Executive Director: Marketing & Communications*



*Hajira Mansour
Executive Director: Internal Audit*



*Ms. Matshepo Moberg
Company Secretary*



*Reuben Mogano
Executive Director: Development Management*



*Thami Ngwenya
Acting Executive Director: R&D*



*Phumlani Zwane
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