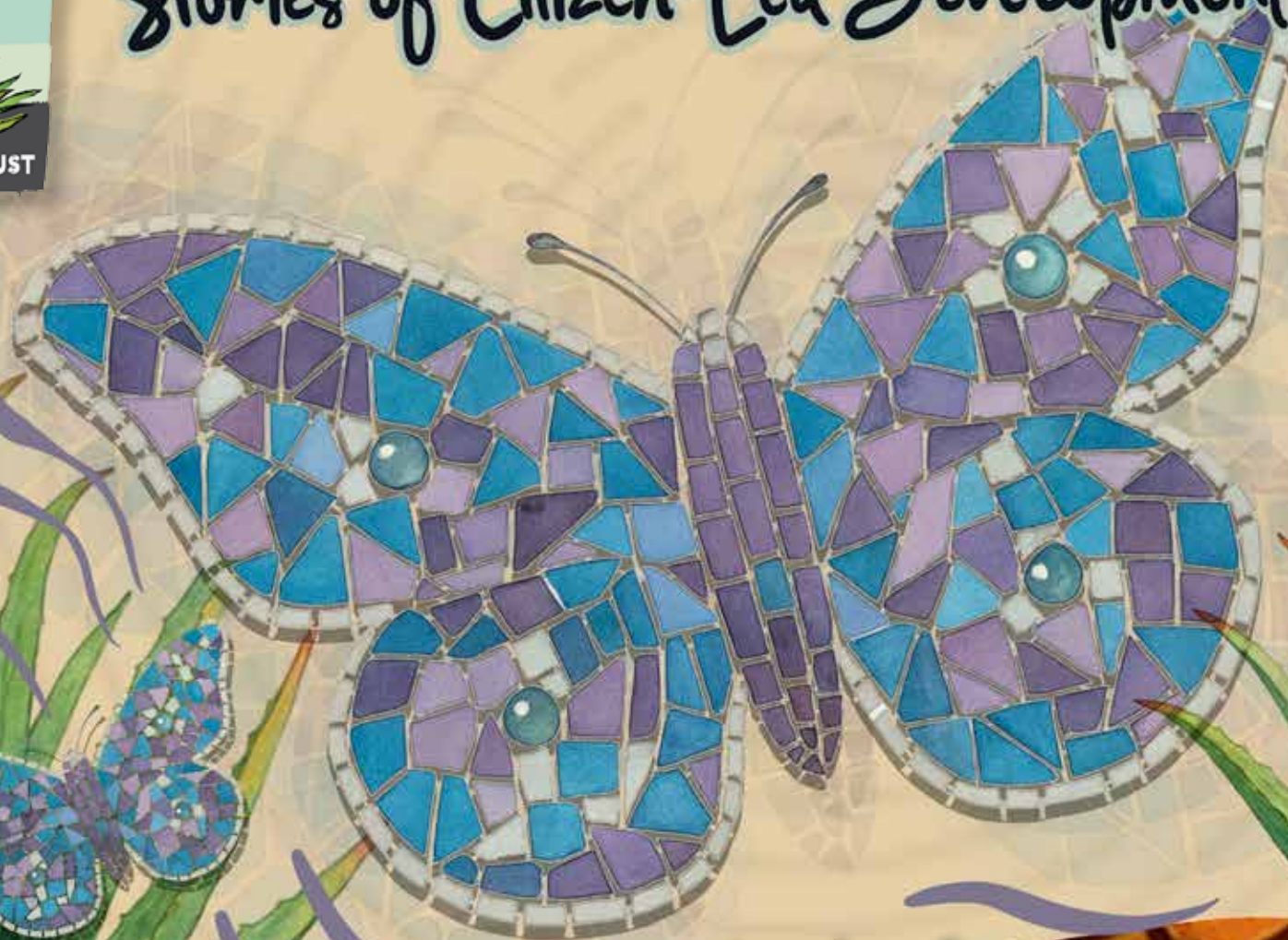


THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Stories of Citizen-Led Development



#ShiftThePower



Leaders Inspiring Change in South Africa



Vision

Self-reliant, confident and vibrant organizations are able to envision and catalyse positive change in themselves and their communities.

Mission

To support community-led initiatives in the Eastern Cape by building relationships, enhancing capacity and facilitating access to funds.


Objective 1

Community partners confidently engage decision-makers (e.g., public officials) and / or influence local development.

Objective 2

Other stakeholders / agencies / grant makers adopt and advocate for strengths-based approaches in community development practice





"The "butterfly effect" is a concept in chaos theory that describes how a small change in initial conditions can lead to large differences in outcomes...(where) seemingly insignificant events or actions can have a significant and unpredictable impact on complex systems... the idea that a butterfly flapping its wings in one place could hypothetically trigger a tornado on the other side of the world" - Chatgpt, 2025

Ikhala Trust

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We deeply appreciate all the individuals who contributed to this publication including Ikhala Trustees, staff and grantee partners featured: Hugs of Hope, Goboti Residents Association (GRA) and the Co-op Community Trust. In particular, special thank you to their respective leaders and all other respondents who contributed to this project:

Hugs of Hope: Teresa Opperman (Founder Member /Manager); Hettie Hänker (Charity Shop Manager); Gladys Hayiya (Training Manager); Tariro Chinyoka (Chef / Food and Beverage Manager); Lettie (Letwin Runyambo) (former trainee/ entrepreneur); Miekie Brown (Stock & Floor Manager at Hugs shop and creche).

Goboti Residents Association (GRA): Rev Gcobani Vika (Chairperson); Mr Bonile Vanqa; Ms Nokuzola Magida (consultant); Prof Peggy Luswazi (partner / advisor)

The Co-op Community Trust: Willem Oosthuizen, Lunga Mlangeni, Michelle Dorfling, Matthyliise Brown and Rikus Vorster (CEO - Co-op).

Thank you also to all those who were interviewed in this project, contributing their wealth of experience and insight.

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Foreword

Sarah Hugow, Chairperson

The stories shared in this publication chronicle leaders - and the programmes they shaped - whose work has been pioneering in many respects. Each leader, grounded in faith and a belief in human dignity and justice, embraced a simple yet radical idea: that community development should not focus on needs and deficits, but rather on strengths, assets, and potential.

Through their vision and leadership, they have mobilised people and resources to bring about hopeful, sustainable, and tangible change in communities where such transformation once seemed impossible.

The stories emerge against the backdrop of South Africa's complex and painful history of colonialism, racial segregation, and systemic inequality. More than three decades have passed since the democratic transition of 1994, which ushered in the promise of a "New Dawn." And while South Africa has made notable strides - especially in the endurance of democratic institutions under significant pressure - we continue to face intractable challenges: extreme inequality, limited economic mobility, weak public services, and an environment under threat.

Globally, South Africa is not alone. Many societies are grappling with widening inequality, stagnating progress, and the

consequences of neoliberal economic policies that have failed to deliver inclusive growth. Around the world, the erosion of social gains, growing authoritarianism, and the mounting impacts of climate breakdown and environmental degradation are sparking unrest, nationalism, and an urgent questioning of globalisation and perpetual growth as sustainable models.

So what does this mean for a small community grantmaker at the southern tip of Africa?

It reminds us that real development is both vertical and horizontal. Vertically, it must be bottom-up - rooted in local contexts, human-scaled, and respectful of community autonomy - while also being supported by top-down policies that enable, rather than stifle, grassroots innovation. Horizontally, development requires networks of solidarity - across regions and communities - to share lessons, adopt good practices, and build a collective force for change.

Ikhala's mission has always been to invest at the micro-level - an often overlooked and underestimated sphere of transformation. Macro-level interventions, however strategic, cannot thrive if they do not take root in fertile local soil. We know too well the failures of disconnected, top-down approaches - those

"white elephants" of development that waste resources and erode public trust.

At the heart of effective grassroots development is catalytic local leadership. This is why the stories in this volume matter. They explore how individuals, shaped by their communities and driven by shared values of fairness and justice, rose to lead with humility, courage, and practical innovations.

We hope that these case studies provide valuable insights - not only into the unique journeys of each leader, but also into the broader, universal lessons of servant leadership. Our hope is that these stories plant seeds of inspiration, helping grow a more just and compassionate world - starting in our own communities.

May you find these stories as compelling and uplifting as we did. And may the legacy and values that Ikhala has championed continue to echo far beyond these pages.

Introduction

"Each community has its own culture and, no less importantly, its own rhythm. In order to gain respect of its citizens, we need to listen carefully and with humility to what these daily rhythms are all about. This is what we have attempted to do when conducting the case studies that make up this publication: to enter communities with deep humility and listen from the heart. We hope that the result will encourage other development practitioners to do the same."

- Bernie Dolley, Director, Ikhala Trust ¹

Ikhala Trust has always valued the power of storytelling – listening deeply to people, engaging heart to heart, and celebrating stories. Ikhala has honoured many pioneering narrators who initiate, lead, and manage non-profit organisations in powerful ways, seeding change at each stage of the process. Over Ikhala Trust's 23 year trajectory, stories have always woven concepts and insights together, echoing the tapestry of the Eastern Cape's diverse and colourful landscape, where Ikhala has left footprints and touched the lives of many.

Ikhala has been a consistent and prominent voice in South Africa advocating for strengths-based and citizen-led development. As a community grantmaker and development incubator

supporting community-based and non profit organisations, Ikhala has produced many educational materials, articles, publications and case studies such as those presented in this series, one of the few organisations who consistently tells stories to share lessons and insights, as our ancestors did under the baobab tree.

In this publication, we have chosen to listen and deeply understand three particular stories that can offer inspiration and practical leadership at a watershed time in South Africa and globally.

The publication is funded by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) to support the **#shiftthepower Campaign**.

Who is Ikhala Trust?

Ikhala Trust is a micro-grantmaker operating in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa since 2002. Ikhala practices and advocates a strengths-based approach to community development, offering technical support and 'small grants' to 'small organisations' as a stepping stone towards organisational and programmatic development. Ikhala has also been at the vanguard of advocating for Asset Based Community-led Development (ABCD), representing a fundamental paradigm shift in the social and community development field.



¹ cited in Eliasov, N., & Peters, B. (2013). Voices in harmony: Stories of community-driven development in South Africa. Coady Institute

ABCD is a clear departure from mainstream 'problem-based' philanthropic efforts, supporting organisations to build on their strengths to sustain and grow their work and leverage balanced partnerships (change from the 'inside-out').

Why did we decide to share these case studies?

Ikhala was seeded in 2001 when Misereor, an international German funder, began promoting the idea of decentralised grantmaking in order to strengthen collaborative and responsive investment in South Africa. The concept of 'subsidiarity' that drove these initial conversations is even more relevant today and resonates strongly with the #shiftthepower campaign of the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF).

Subsidiarity advocates that decisions be made at the most local or immediate level possible rather than by a detached or centralised external authority. The development sector knows all too well the dangers of 'top down' development interventions that can disrupt and disturb the natural flow of citizen action in communities. Funding can be a 'double-edged sword' - bringing resources, but many times also coming with strings attached (beyond simple accountability requirements) that push agendas and tip the

power balance in favour of the donor agency. We support the intention behind the #shiftthepower movement to restore authentic and mutually respectful relationships between partners and investors in the development sector.

*"Asymmetrical power relations in international aid and development efforts, which favour the funder and cast the recipient as supplicant, are facing renewed challenges. Foundations...are being called upon to advocate for adjustments that allow people to decide what is best for themselves. The Global Summit on Community Philanthropy, convened by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) in December 2016, used the banner "#ShiftThePower" to catalyse a discussion on what community-led development — based on community priorities, leadership, and ownership — can contribute to shifting power away from funders and toward communities ...These dialogues signal the possibility that we are poised to usher in a new era in thinking and practice."*²

Ikhala has remained true to its vision and mandate of community grantmaking since inception. Yet, over these past 23 years, it has offered so

much more to grantees and networking partners including research and publications to engender appreciation, as well as recognition and practical examples of citizen-led development.

For example, in 2013 we produced 'Voices in Harmony – Stories of Community-driven Development in South Africa' with the Coady International Institute in Canada, in which we shared four in-depth stories of community based organisations rooted in the Eastern Cape, driving their own development pathway using and growing their assets. Sadly, only one of the organisations featured in that report still exists today. Affected by the political economy in the country, increased competition for scarce resources, and the 'top-down' service delivery focus of government, many grassroots organisations like these have floundered.

The purpose of this publication, and the stories we have chosen to share, is slightly different to our 2013 publication, in that we will learn from protagonists of change who are driving a strengths-based and regenerative development paradigm at various levels of the development sector, not just community-based organisations. Two stories showcase how NGOs (Hugs of Hope, The Co-op Community Trust) have applied ABCD

² The Foundation Review (2017), Global Community Philanthropy: #ShiftThePower: Community Giving as a Critical Consciousness - Raising Tool, Susan Wilkinson-Maposa and Bernie Dolley, Ikhala Trust, - Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Grand Valley State University, Volume 9, Issue 3.



as a paradigm and practice. The third case study highlights how an organised community (Goboti Residents Association (GRA) in a rural village has organically discovered local strengths and leveraged their assets.

These stories focus on both personal and organisational aspects, exploring how pioneering leaders have shaped their organisations and some of their profound influences and leadership lessons. In doing so, we hope to highlight and also benchmark how leaders can best catalyse change.

Why the Butterfly Effect?

"The 'Butterfly Effect' is a concept in chaos theory that describes how a small change in initial conditions can lead to large differences in outcomes...(where) seemingly insignificant events or actions can have a significant and unpredictable impact on complex systems... the idea that a butterfly flapping its wings in one place could hypothetically trigger a tornado on the other side of the world." (chatgpt)

We have chosen 'The Butterfly Effect' as a theme and analogy for these inspirational stories and for Ikhala Trust itself because we believe that small and simple efforts can bring quantum effects. The slogan 'small is the new big', coined at a national ABCD festival we hosted in 2015, is still a potent signpost of transformative development practice. The leaders profiled in this publication

hold an awareness of complexity, yet also value simplicity. They all model servant leadership and often underrate the enormous impact of their transformative ideas and simple actions.

What is ABCD?

ABCD is a development process designed to be inspirational, regenerative, and 'life-giving'. Through the use of Appreciative Inquiry as its core framework, it invites individuals and groups to harness local assets and discover their agency. Stakeholders (responsive co-investors), hold a position of curiosity and discovery through an ABCD process in which they learn how they can support organisations and communities to drive their own development process. This allows for co-investing in what people can do, and desire to do, building on strengths – which is logically empowering and more sustainable. This seems to be an obvious foundation for development - as the passion and driving force comes from people themselves rather than external role-players. There is no 'blanket approach' here, or development model coming from the 'top-down', for role players to 'buy – in' to (often through bargaining and sometimes mutual manipulation). There are countless examples of development programmes that have failed because of imposed frameworks and superficial participation.

True motivation ignites the human spirit and spreads like a flaming fire into action. ABCD, facilitated with an appreciative paradigm, offers

a methodology for transformative self-awareness and learning and encourages development programmes which build on strengths and create more balanced power relationships.

What questions did we ask?

Specific research questions that guided the learning conversations on which this publication is based included:

- How did the organisation start and why?
- How did leadership find you?
- How have you inspired positive change?
What are some of the key processes and practices you have applied?
- How have you harnessed local strengths and assets through your work?
- How did ABCD assist as a methodology?
- What have been some of the impacts of working in this way on local communities?
- What have been some of the impacts of working in this way for you personally?
- How has working in a strengths-based way shifted power dynamics in the organisation / community?
- What have been some of the challenges/ stumbling blocks you have faced as a leader and how have you overcome these challenges/stumbling blocks?
- What is the message you want to give to other leaders in the development sector about strengths based development approaches?

Who was engaged?

The research was multi-layered and included: a literature scan, sourcing media reports and photos relevant to each story, and holding many interesting conversations with leaders, their colleagues, and learning partners (beneficiaries). In total 16 interviews were conducted.

Structure of the Publication

We have always enjoyed finding natural analogies to explain our work, based on an understanding that we too (and the organisations pioneers innovate) are part of nature. Fitting with the title of 'The Butterfly Effect', we have drawn on the life cycle of the butterfly as a framework for storytelling:

Each story has key themes that reflect the stage of the life cycle linked to the journey of the person and the formation of the organisation they lead. Each ends with a set of reflective questions to stimulate critical thinking and dialogue around emerging themes. We hope that these stories will spark stimulating and transformative conversations.

In this metaphor, the individuals and their organisations reflect different stages of the life-cycle:



The Eggs – All butterflies start as tiny oval eggs, like emerging organisations. **Ikhala Trust**, as a community grantmaker has offered a nourishing incubator and bridge for many organisations during their pioneering phase;



The Caterpillar – **Hugs of Hope** – an emerging Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) in the small town of Hofmeyr;



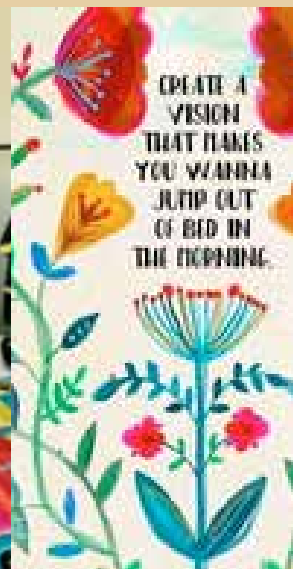
The Chrysalis – **Goboti Residents Association (GRA)**, a well-established development umbrella in a rural village that finds itself on a precipice – staying localised or expanding its influence regionally;



The Butterfly – **The Co-op Community Trust** – spreading its wings throughout Eastern (and now into the Western and Southern) Cape, managing complexity and scale.



In the concluding section, we draw out common threads around leadership, power, and impact. We look at what galvanises people to initiate change, and the conditions and practical methods that can support or obstruct change, especially at the local level. We then tease out our hypothesis that **shifting the paradigm** away from a focus on problems and needs towards an appreciation of strengths and assets is a **precondition for shifting power** in our society.



Ikhala's Story



All butterflies start as tiny oval eggs. These are attached with a special glue to a plant to keep them safe and provide nourishment for the caterpillar that will later emerge. Similarly, a community grantmaker can offer a nourishing incubator and bridge for emerging organisations.

"We knew that we wanted to be a grassroots grantmaker, and support small emerging organizations. We subscribed to the whole just principle of subsidiarity, where decisions are made at the lowest possible level. And those principles still stand today." (Bernie)

Ikhala's story spanning 23 years is well documented. We produced 'Ikhala Trust – our 10-year journey (2002 - 2012)' and 'Expanding the Footprint' (2019) - the latter also funded by GFCF. We share here visually, the moving, inspiring, humorous and impactful legacy that Ikhala gifts to the sector, especially its 'ABCD Journey'.



Our ABCD Journey

2002 - 2006

Ikhala Trust was registered as a strengths-based community grantmaker and development incubator in Eastern Cape with seed funding from Misereor.

2007 - 2010

- Bernie was invited to participate in the European Foundation's Conference in Brussels, where she met Susan Wilkinson- Maposa, who at the time worked at the University of Cape Town's graduate School of Business (Community grantmaking and Social investment Programme).
- Susan invited Ikhala Trust to pilot a method of 'measuring and Valuing Community Contributions', as part of research published in: The Poor Philanthropist.
- Susan reintroduced Ikhala Trust to the Coady institute through collaboration with Alison Mathie (Sarah and Bernie had met Gord Cunningham in 2005, at a meeting in Bhisho, with the National Development Agency (NDA) and Fort Hare University).
- A Case Study was developed by Susan on the Jansenville Development Forum for inclusion in the book: "Clients to Citizens" a Coady publication.
- 4th Ikhala grantee Conference held "amplifying the voice of grassroots organisations"
- 1st official ABCD workshop held at UCT graduate School of Business.
- Launch of the "Clients to Citizens" book and Allan Fowler's "Civic Driven Change"
- 1st official 4-day Asset Based Community Development workshop held in Port Elizabeth, facilitated by Brianne Peters (Coady institute), assisted by Bernie.
- Coady facilitates an ABCD seminar at NMMU.



2011 - 2015

- ABCD workshops presented by Ninnette Eliasov as part of Ikhala's capacity-building programme and continues annually – first with CBO grantees, and increasingly with multi-stakeholders over the years.
- Concept Note for an Action Research project between Coady and Ikhala Trust approved.
- 7th annual grantee Conference: 'link, look, listen and learn – appreciating and value our assets' at St Luke's Port Elizabeth.
- Bernie receives a bursary, to attend the: mobilising assets and livelihoods and markets Short Course at the Coady Institute in Canada
- Ikhala Trust and Elamanzi jointly produced an ABCD Toolkit, which has paradigm shifting or consciousness building as a core innovation to ABCD practice;
- Action Research with the Coady Institute is finalised and the documentary and publication: 'Voices in Harmony' – Stories of Community led Development;
- Case Study – Ikhala Trust/ Calabash Trust: ABCD and Permaculture in WB Tshume Primary School;
- Rapid appraisal of Ikhala's ABCD Programme;
- ABCD Festival: 'Small is the new Big' (2015)

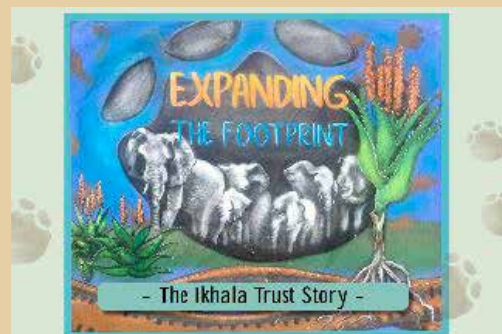
2016 - 2020

- ABCD Festival: Head, Heart and Hands (2016)
- Case Study: Kwenzekile Community Development Centre (KCDC)
- Case Study: Tarka Story
- ABCD Festival: Feel the Fear and do it Anyway (2017)
- International ABCD Imbizo hosted by Ikhala in Gqeberha
- ABCD Festival: Our Stories Matter (2018)
- Expanding the Footprint is produced to document Ikhala's Story and grantmaking model; and 'Footprints – How a Grantmaker Shifts Power is written for Ikhala by Alison Mathie and Ninnette Eliasov, supporting #ShiftthePower and funded by GFCF
- ABCD Festival GOA

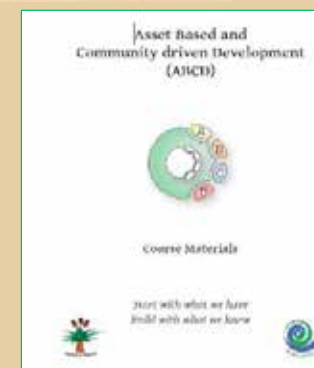
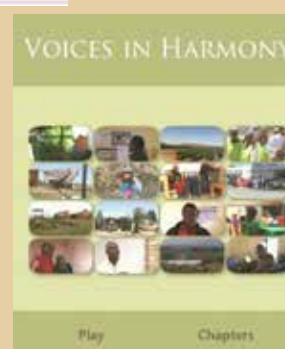
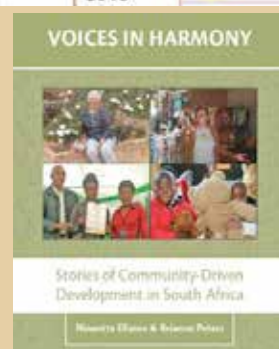
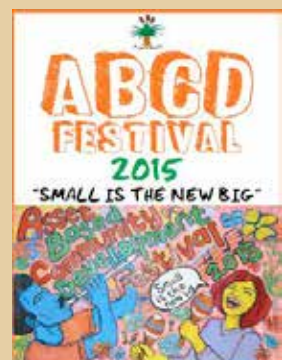
2021 - 2025

- Ikhala and Elamanzi jointly development ABCD-E online training and materials to continue popularising ABCD during Covid lockdown;
- ABCD Unconference: Transforming Organisations – Shifting Paradigms
- Localised ABCD workshops facilitated throughout Eastern Cape once lockdown lifts;
- ABCD facilitation for the Social Employment Fund (SEF)





A strengths-based community development incubator and grant-maker in South Africa





Case Study #1 : Hugs of Hope



Hugs of Hope



"Economic growth opportunities mostly bypass hinterland towns and their visible decline continues. To counter this, a new vision of community development is needed - one that places both a material and social value on the work of volunteers and encourages principles of local economic circularity and local resource management." Sarah Hugow, Ikhala Trust Chairperson, Annual Report 2023/4

Hofmeyr is a small landlocked town in the Chris Hani District of Eastern Cape - 64 km north-east of Cradock, its nearest economic hub. The town is at the centre of a flourishing sheep farming industry and boasts the Teviot salt pans 10km to its West. It also benefits from the Orange/Fish River irrigation scheme which forms a large part of this district.

The town started to decline when the tar road bypass to Cradock was built in 1972, crippling the local economy and causing a brain drain of its most educated residents. Today, 95% of the residents of Hofmeyr and surrounds rely on social grants and many are indebted to predatory lenders. The once bustling church hall attracts just a handful of children to Sunday School and Hofmeyr seems to be a shadow of its former self.

It is not easy to imagine how to galvanise change in this seemingly barren landscape. Yet our first case study - Hugs of Hope – is doing exactly that.



Weaving a Cocoon

Teresa Opperman is well known in Hofmeyr - her home for the past 41 years. She is fiercely passionate about development, immeasurably creative, inspirational, charismatic, strategic, and absolutely fearless as she carries forward the seeds of compassionate service instilled by her late mother Ella.

Ikhala Trust and Hugs of Hope have collaboratively told the story of Hugs and how the organisation evolved over the past seven years. We add to this story by rewinding to its early beginnings - to



Teresa's childhood home and the countless boxes that Ella collated for everyone who tugged at her heartstrings in Cradock where the family lived. This is where Teresa's generosity was birthed and where the story of Hugs of Hope begins...

"It starts with my mother Ella, who had a heart for giving and caring. She instilled a deep sense of caring into each of her four daughters and never allowed us to be bored. We all had to develop our talents and stay busy in the process." (Teresa)



Teresa married Roelf and moved to a farm 40km from Hofmeyr when she was 24. They worked hard to pay off their loan, raise three children, and create a sustainable livelihood together. Using some of her savings, she took a chance when she saw five sewing machines for sale at her daughter's primary school and bought all of them. Thus began a journey of self-discovery blending creativity with visionary leadership.

Teresa first discovered her artistry when she handpainted a fabric line in 1984 that gained national recognition. She taught herself to sew, crochet, design, and undertake community work – gaining knowledge from mentors, through trial and error and an insatiable appetite for learning. Intuitively, she gathered a group of women from her farm and together they developed basic sewing skills, thus opening a pathway for income generation.

Passion, human connection and group-based learning have naturally grown out of these organic roots. Yet, pioneering an organisation can be tough, especially in a small town which is socially and politically isolated. With a population of just 3300 people - everyone knows everyone in Hofmeyr.

Formation



In 2016, Teresa was invited by a church group to support tourism revival in town. Through her active engagement, she was invited to attend an Ikhalala Trust ABCD workshop in Tarkastad in December the following year. She was confused at first, as the workshop focussed on community assets rather than fund-raising to address needs, which she had expected. She almost returned home wondering if she was in the right place:

“When she came into this workshop – this regal, beautiful woman – she said: “I thought this was a fund-raising workshop -this does not have anything to do with Hugs?” I said she is welcome to stay and the next morning she was the first to arrive.” (Bernie)

Teresa opted to be open-minded and stayed for the full 3 days, unprepared for how ABCD would pivot her thinking. Most significantly for her was a sharp realisation that the workshop was not just about Hofmeyr's tourism revival but was in fact the conception of Hugs of Hope itself:

“Not only did I find out within the first 30 minutes that Hofmeyr Hugs of Hope was not a project anymore (but rather an organisation), I also found out that large numbers of NPOs exist in close proximity to Hofmeyr and were all struggling to get registered. As Bernie started the training, I didn't see Hofmeyr developing in front of me, I saw Hugs develop and I wrote a business plan for Hugs.” (Teresa)

Teresa was accompanied by Sanet Coetzer and Obré van Heerden at this workshop – two of her influential and skilled friends, and together they crafted socio-economic solutions for Hofmeyr. Teresa, following her instincts and guidance from Ikhalala Trust, visited communities within 100km radius of town to consult and shape a business plan:

“I had to change my line of thought completely, and also the way that I wanted to transfer the message to the people with whom I work...I got back to Hofmeyr, and got Sanet and Obré together ...and then we suddenly thought: “Why don't we teach people to make patchwork quilts?”

She invited residents, especially those facing social and economic challenges to a meeting in the local church hall and 35 people arrived. After sharing a hearty meal together, she shared her vision of uplifting and empowering the people of Hofmeyr.¹ Hugs of Hope was registered as an NPO a few months later with an Advisory Board and a women's sewing and quilting group.

¹ Bernie Dolley, Teresa Opperman (2021): A Story of Hope and Resilience from Community Members in the small town of Hofmeyr, Ikhalala Trust

Strategic Framework

Vision

Creating a happy, healthy Hofmeyr.

Mission

To create a happy, healthy and holistic Hofmeyr by including the whole community, the surrounding areas and eventually involve the whole of South Africa in developing skills to empower people.

Objectives

- To provide a safe space where all community members have an opportunity to learn new skills, improve their quality of life and restore their human dignity;
- To produce high quality products that can be sold at a profit in order for members to increase their household income;
- To provide a safe and caring space where everyone is welcome, respected and appreciated regardless of religion, race and culture; and offer social services.

Spinning Silk

"Millions of metres of beautifully spun threads are used to sew quilts together, combining all colours of the rainbow - reminding us of the hard work of the caterpillar - first the silk is spun before it can be made into something beautiful." (Teresa)

Teresa is recognised for her elegance, fierce determination, and unbounded enthusiasm. She is also a journalist and showcases Hofmeyr and the tales of the Karoo through print and online media. Her ear is always close to the ground, listening to the buzz of conversation and remaining responsive to opportunities which magically arise throughout her day. Teresa's story of creativity, courage, and resilience is remarkable, especially as she has lived with Type 1 diabetes since childhood and must manage her energy more carefully than most.

Regenerating during treatment in 2016, Teresa experienced a huge mindshift that birthed Hugs at the same time - so deeply valuing the small acts of kindness and care that had boosted her health along the way. Growing out of a deep personal healing journey came the name 'Hugs':

"When you are in a bad emotional or physical shape, a HUG can make a huge difference, hence Hugs of Hope was birthed." (Teresa)



Sanet lent Hugs 2 sewing machines, and Obré who worked full time in the health sector volunteered in her spare time to do health assessments and assist with the nutrition scheme. Teresa sourced donations from neighbours and friends for upcycling, to sell cheaply at the emerging Hugs' shop or as raw materials for the sewing and quilting group. Hugs set up an incentivised business model with a 50% cost share. Half of revenue goes to producers and the other half to Hugs for sustainability. This was a strategic move ensuring that the value chain remains locally driven and encouraging everyone to 'think out of the box' from the onset:

"We use what we have - we don't throw anything away... I found that if you live that way you actually can carry on - it's like you open the door of your brain... We had to think out of the box to get us going and we did." (Teresa)

Teresa works systematically and tirelessly - a worker bee - always pollinating, never giving up - the mark of a pioneer. Many of Hugs' initiatives are tangibly scattered throughout town stirring a spirit of regeneration. Like the colourful murals that line the main road town sponsored by Lottoland 'Help 'n Dorp' to revive the town; the bags of plastic collected by youth under the watchful eye of Barend Opperman (self appointed 'cleaner-upper' who organised this group); the distribution and sale of bakkie loads of donated goods which regularly arrive at Hugs depots, and the crafters



who consign and sell their products throughout Hugs' network.

Most excitingly, the town is beginning to buy into and rally around a shared vision with a landmark decision to become plastic-free. Hugs now upcycles and distributes locally made bags in all retail shops. Nothing is discarded at Hugs, except the many seeds that are slowly greening the town:

"We make jams from anything, from onions, from watermelon skins. We make jam because we don't throw anything away....Pumpkins, butternuts, oranges, lemons, peaches, apples, all those pips get planted...It is changing the way our town looks. When you see Hofmeyr and the surrounding communities now - trees are growing everywhere." (Teresa)

The streets of Hofmeyr are gradually changing – a cleaner and greener environment so symbolic of renewal. But there are many Hugs' impacts that are invisible to the public eye – seen only at the personal and household levels, and these subtle changes are keeping Teresa and the Hugs team motivated:

"They (neighbours) would phone me after they have read something on Facebook and say – "Can I assist you? or "Can I have tea with you? Can I come to Hofmeyr to visit?" I have all these people sending donations. Brilliant, beautiful donations get delivered to our depots country wide. Somebody phoned me this morning saying: "I'm going through a difficult time so I need to pack a few things for you, because once I've taken them out of my cupboard, I know that I'll feel better. A well trained and learned lady who has travelled the world said to me that she cannot go a week if she hasn't been to Hugs Those are the things that make it worthwhile." (Teresa)



Achievements

As the caterpillar grows it splits its skin and sheds it about 4 or 5 times. Food eaten at this time is stored and used later, and caterpillars can grow 100 times their size.

Although Hugs of Hope is still growing, emerging and finding its way - it has achieved much in its first 7 years - born out of a leadership style that naturally appreciates local resources and talent:

- A Horse-riding Academy was set up by Zettie Jordaan;
- 45 Jerseys were knitted in 5 days as a fundraiser to coincide with Schalk Bezuidenhout's book launch – "Truitjie Roer my nie";
- Hugs has partnered with ACVV for social services;
- A mobile Veterinary Service was established on the last Tuesday of each month;
- Many seamstresses have received sewing machines from Hugs to enable them to sew from home. If they do not have access to electricity, they are supplied with mechanically operated machines;
- A Quilting Machine was sourced from Pearl Lombard to give Hugs products a professional finish;
- 43 past learners have found employment through Hugs (55% success rate) and 5 of the original sewing trainees have found work in other Provinces;
- There are 8 active small scale farmers involved in piggeries, vegetable and fruit production. They also produce mulch and sawdust for sale;
- 6 schools were assisted with learner materials and a playground was sponsored through Hugs in one primary school;
- Ikhala Trust has co-invested with several small grants consistently since 2018 and the organisation received Ikhala's grantee of the year award in 2019;
- Hugs has received several awards in recognition of service excellence in the region, most notably, the WAA Change your Community Trophy in 2018. Teresa has also been recognised by being awarded the Dameskring North Eastern Cape Change Maker Woman of the Year award in 2024;
- The town celebrated its 150-year anniversary in December 2024 and attracted 6000 visitors from 17 countries – a great boost for the local economy. Hugs and their members were able to sell produce and products.



Borrowing ideas and innovating new ones is still the mainstay of the organisation and the wellspring from which it draws energy. On a weekly basis new product lines are emerging that are proudly South African. The sewing trainees come from diverse backgrounds, and many ideas develop when many minds put their hearts together in a design process.

Our lives are like quilts – bits and pieces, joy and sorrow, stitched with love - unknown

Quilts connect the past with the present and the future – Ann Gabhart



Current Activities

Hugs has no operational funding, yet the organisation has established three local depots for donations, a shop, a training centre at Amajuba (sponsored by the Opperman farm), a fully equipped training centre in the Hugs House (Alida), 30 home-based depots countrywide run by volunteers, a network of vehicles assisting with transport, a vibrant Facebook page, Friends of Hugs WhatsApp group² and volunteer group as well as 22 satellite projects with partner organisations run by volunteers.

Hug's current activities are varied, shifting like the seasons according to people's interests and skill sets. Current activities include:

- Sewing and quilt-making training, production and sales;
- A recycling initiative linked to a nutrition scheme to support children during school holidays;
- Living Ball & Living Art – a recreational programme run weekly at local schools teaching sport, art and craft skills;
- Mat making for export with donated sheepskins from a local farm.

² There are now 310 people on the Hugs whatsapp group and 3200 Facebook followers – triple the statistics of last year

The Hugs quilts have travelled far and wide throughout South Africa and beyond since those early days - generating income for the organisation and the people who make them. This flagship project, magically mirrors the patched kaleidoscope of Hofmeyr's own social fabric. Quilts integrate each part – bringing segments together that may seem disconnected and unaligned at first, but when combined, they create unexpected beauty.

Hugs is influencing many layers at the same time, yet its most profound work may be at the individual and household levels. Let's hear now from some learning partners themselves.



Miekie Brown

Miekie is 34 years old and looks after her sister's children. When a position opened at Hugs for a child minder, Miekie readily applied. She received training in Educare and currently takes care of six children, teaching them craft and life skills. She also manages the Hugs Shop.

"I have learned a lot. To be patient with children and with people, especially older people. If you get angry, you can't do anything, it is best not to talk back. ... Before they met me, I was a very uneducated person. A quiet person. It was very difficult for me. I had nothing. I did not want to listen to anyone. I was just impulsive - following my head. My head said, do this and do that, and I just did it, until I was 27 when I was disabled by a car accident and my life changed. ... I am so respectful now. People see everything in me. They see I have made a difference in my life (and) ... I feel very good when people say these things." (Miekie – Interview)

Leti Runyambu

Leti joined the sewing and quilting group at Hugs in 2018 but this was just the beginning. When she attended ABCD training with Ikhala Trust, she crafted a vision for her future which she is still passionately pursuing:

"I want to tell you the story of Leti Runyambu. When she came to Hugs, she was absolutely fascinated. She was a trained upholsterer, but upholstering work is not where you use a lot of creativity. The orders would come in and she would do a brown couch and a grey chair and then she would dream of making nice cushions to go with the couches. Eventually I said to her: "Do what you want and show me what you can do." And then Leti started making clothes. She would go to Komani (Queenstown) every six weeks to buy fabric, take orders and make dresses. And then beautiful things happened after that." (Teresa – Interview 2)

In 2023, to recover from a serious illness, Leti went back to Zimbabwe for six months where she started farming with her family. She had already bought cows and pigs while she was working at Hugs and now added seedlings which she planted. When she returned back to South Africa, she had a sewing machine and was ready to start her own business which has since flourished. In fact, Leti recently employed three people to help make tracksuits for schools in Molteno where she lives. She is now living her dream - as a farmer and owner of an enterprise which employs several others.

When asked why Hugs has impacted Leti to such an extent, Teresa mentioned that is because of her firm commitment, resourcefulness and pro-action:

"Leti attended all the trainings, she was open-minded and when she came back from ABCD in Gqeberha she had this perfect vision of what she wanted to do in life. And then we took her to another ABCD training at the beginning of 2019 in Molteno which Bernie also facilitated where she presented her own business plan which she absolutely followed through... She also has this 100% positive personality." (Teresa)

Tariro Chinyoka

Tari manages the cooking at Hugs and is also in charge of the Hugs garden which supplies food to the kitchen.

"I come from Mashvingo in Zimbabwe and during High School, I come to South Africa looking for a job. I worked in Cape Town and after I got married to a man from Hofmeyr, we moved here in 2019... I joined hugs in 2021. Teresa started teaching me to sew some things like aprons, clothes, they taught me to make small things and I loved it. I also like to cook, bake and to farm, I farm beans, vegetables, all sorts of things... The change that I see in my life now is that I am not going to borrow someone's things, like vegetables. I have learnt to make these for myself, to use my hands to work for me and my children... I feel happy. I have even taught another friend of mine to make a garden. Now she is good in gardening and can (contribute) to her family." (Tariro)

Hettie Hänker

Hettie is the Hugs Hofmeyr Depot Manager and assists with layby management.

"Hettie knew me a long time before Hugs started. She was in charge of the church hall and would visit. Then one day I said: "Why don't you join us?" And she said: "I was wondering why you never asked!", so I said: "No, Hugs doesn't work like that. Hugs is open to everybody." (Teresa)

"I am almost 73 years old - a mother of two children and grandmother of two. My story with Teresa started 41 years ago when our children went to (boarding) school together. Teresa was always there to pick them up and bring them back on a Friday and so we became friends... We have the same values. We talk to each other and are in one church... I believe the Lord has given her these incredible powers - she can make the most incredible clothes, and she can "see" with her eyes into your soul - she has an incredible vision. She's got a voice like an angel, because she can sing. And my mouth drops when I hear her speak - the way she addresses a meeting - you always leave with something, I appreciate her even more now. I've got to say, I love her... She's fearless and doesn't stop until she gets somewhere." (Hettie)

Gladys Hayiya

Gladys Hayiya is a sewing trainee and a retired nurse and midwife, she also assists Hugs with training in Home-based Care.

"Gladys Hayiya, who is a qualified nursing sister worked in London for many years. She arrived at Hugs one morning and said: 'I hear everybody in town is talking about Hugs on Wednesday. So I wanted to come and see what is happening.' Well, Gladys is now doing needlework lessons because she inherited an old Bonita sewing machine from her grandmother. She is coming to Hugs every Wednesday, and loves it so much." (Teresa)

"I came back to Hofmeyr from the UK in 2022 and knew about Hugs of Hope, but not really in detail. I started getting bored as I was still recovering (from Covid lockdown) and was trying to adjust. Then in 2024, I thought: 'No, man! I've settled now. ', and it was then that I started inquiring about Hugs. I went there to learn and I am now in my second month of sewing. I'm enjoying it you know, actually, I'm looking forward (each week). I always tell people: 'You know my schedule, it's very busy on Wednesday because I've got to go to Hugs!'" (Gladys)

Gladys raised her sister's 4 children and now has 4 grandchildren. She will be 72 years this December.



Thorns Amongst Roses

"Every community needs a motivator/ambassador/champion...however the challenge is to ensure that no one is left out and that everyone feels they are valued and have a contribution to make." (Bernie/ Teresa)

It is not easy to navigate the socio-political field in Hofmeyr, especially where there are old deep-seated dynamics that have played out amongst the town's small population over generations amongst residents, neighbours, employees, employers, farmers and farmworkers.

Unity in Diversity

Teresa is determined to foster unity. She is an incredible connector and brave 'gapper' who fearlessly cuts through rigid social norms. She inspires change simply by being herself. Yet, breaking down rigid stereotypes and bridging divides that have kept people apart for generations can be a revolutionary act in a conservative town like Hofmeyr, and not everyone understands the deeper intention behind Hugs' mission or her life's work:

"My surname is too Afrikaans – that's a problem.... Although I only work with the part of the country that's suffering - they still only see me as a white face...Coming back to Hofmeyr, trying to tell them that this is the way it should be done. Then they react and say: 'But why don't they (Hugs) do it that way?'" So I really have had a lot of animosity." (Teresa)

Hugs is not just a catalyst for tourism or community development, but is also shaking up the social fabric of the town itself. The organisation's most profound contribution might simply be this – bringing disparate people together to learn and forge friendships over a sewing machine and a cup of tea.



Funding's Double-edged Sword

Teresa works entirely voluntarily and Hugs' operational budget is approximately R6 000 per month. It is the first time that such a diverse community-organisation is taking foot in Hofmeyr and whilst Hugs attracted an Ikhala small grant, publicity, exposure and training opportunities – the support received can be a double-edged sword - creating a perception in town that Hugs is well funded:

"Hofmeyr is a very small town and as you know, we are from the era of apartheidWith the present status of government, it's really difficult for improvement in Hofmeyr - people still hold on to (the past)...They still hold on to that mentality that will not improve their status. And also because of this government, people are just there (at Hugs) to feed their pockets... There was a time when Hugs was trying to improve the town ...We were in a community meeting (with) the farmers (who) were hands-on trying to help ...We were cleaning and then, people were demanding – 'It's our money', they were demanding the Hugs money! I had to say: "Hold on. This is a non-governmental organisation." So, there's that greed, and suspicion...(people) wanting those things for themselves. And even if they were given it, they were not going to distribute. They won't share." (Gladys)

"They don't know how small grants work. They think you are well funded." (Teresa)

Ikhala Trust and Hugs have forged a flourishing relationship and Ikhala has accompanied the organisation from its fledgling beginnings and throughout its pioneering phase. The dynamic personalities of both Directors create a melting pot of opportunity and Hugs has gained invaluable opportunity and exposure through Ikhala's support. Yet, any relationship between donor and grantee carries influence, and conversations have arisen over the years about the pace, timing, and Hugs' readiness to receive this attention. In many ways Ikhala has accelerated the growth of Hugs. Stimulating and supporting community led development is a paradox in itself, and the balance of when to give and when to withhold the right measure of support is not always easy to find.



Clashing Paradigms

Hugs is bringing a holistic approach but finds itself straddling two development paradigms – one rooted in welfare that pervades institutions and dominates philanthropic efforts. And the other being strengths or asset based. Poverty thinking is still pervasive and there is an entrenched culture of apathy which can limit the pace and reach of Hugs' work.

Hugs has spring boarded many and supported their development pathways simply by appreciating and building on strengths. But entitlement attitudes, miscommunications, competition and jealousy inevitably arise where there is oppressive culture, signalling that poverty mind-sets still dominate. Teresa and Roelf have co-invested their time, skills and personal resources and this is not always well received:

"Pioneering is not at all easy. It takes so much strength, so much courage, so much resourcefulness. But then again, it breeds so much joy, happiness and success and that is the true prize. We are not doing any of this for ourselves ...I learnt that you must just give where you can and give as much as you can - we have to extend a helping hand, find that person's soul, locate their talents and develop those. Suddenly there is a change and sadly the change is not always received in the best spirit. Sometimes it backfires on us." (Teresa)

Fluidity



The organisation does not hold onto people and lock them into projects and positions. There is a fluid movement as people come and go - a 'permanent shuffle.' Volunteers are equally transient and this can make it difficult to stabilise and grow Hug's structure. The culture of volunteerism is also not as strong as it was in Ella's era, and many who pass through Hugs' doors are living on the breadline and cannot afford to volunteer. Without core funding or stipends to offer, it is challenging for Hugs to maintain a 'professional' staff to build its profile to attract further funding. Sustainability and succession are challenging for this pioneering organisation:

"Sometimes you feel good if you can just open the gate to somebody... But sometimes they don't feel good about it. They want to be paid for it as well." (Teresa)



Managing Resistance

Looking at Hug's media profile, there is a sense that every effort is being made to widen the net and recruit people from all sectors of Hofmeyr's small society – a microcosm of South Africa that can possibly demonstrate how unity in diversity is possible. But resistance is pervasive from all sides, and it seems on many days that Hugs is swimming upstream, fighting the tide that blocks change:

"I wouldn't say there is discrimination – I wouldn't put it like that, (but) you can see my people – they have this, you know – thing (resistance). I can understand because they have not travelled. They have not gone to school... They still hold on to that mentality that will not improve their status... So if you have not extended your knowledge and travelled - you will not understand, you will not be open. So, Hugs for me is as it should be, (but) I wish more people could join – more of my people (who) will not just look at its 'white aspect'. I try to encourage others, like pensioners, but no, they are not coming. They're just not getting it." (Gladys)

There might be thorns amongst the roses being planted by Hugs, but thorns are there to guard and protect. It is understandable that people are protective of Hofmeyr and possibly suspicious of change.

The dominant needs or problem paradigm (way of thinking and seeing) pushed by government and other NGOs fuels limited thinking and creates dependency, which Hugs is working against. This means that any local organisation in Hofmeyr may experience limitations and tensions arising from conflicting paradigms. How do you change limited thinking? How do you shift poverty mindsets dominating Hofmeyr? This is a pivotal question in this story.



Reflections

Hugs is a small emerging organisation, still weaving a cocoon in Hofmeyr and finding its way in the margins of the non-profit sector. What is most striking in this story is the potential impact that a charismatic, creative, and fierce leader can have when they see opportunities everywhere. Being able to take a simple idea and bring it to life in a visible, practical and eco-conscious way is a gift, especially in today's consumerist culture. And then, to cleverly brand a collection of unique, home grown products and get them market and export ready, is a blessing. This attracts new energy to Hofmeyr and showcases the skills, talents and initiatives of its people.

It may not be easy to see its footprints along the dry, dusty roads of the Karoo. But to the quiet observer there is a unique capacity of the organisation to initiate, create and run with its brand. The Hugs Bears are scattered throughout town and many Hofmeyr children have been 'Hugged'. Its adapted Food Jars feed a family of six and keep hunger at bay. And its Quintessential Quilts magically comfort and delight as they mirror the interesting tapestry of Hofmeyr town and Hugs' own patchwork of pioneers.



Questions

- How can pioneering leaders and organisations shift the dominant paradigm away from needs and problems to recognising and mobilising strengths and assets?
- What is the best way to support leaders in emerging community organisations and cultivate collectivity?
- What role could churches and other faith-based organisations play in supporting community-driven development in small towns?
- What partnership criteria should community organisations hold when entering into relationships with multiple external actors in order to retain sovereignty and foster sustainability?
- What support and incentives can be made available to mobilise youth within community-driven initiatives?
- When should outside agencies invest in community driven activities – and in what way can this best be done?
- What role should funders play in supporting the organic growth of community based organisations without interfering with local aspirations?



Case Study # 2 : Goboti Resident's Association (GRA)





Introduction

The Goboti Residents' Association (GRA) was established in 1995 in Goboti, Eastern Cape. The Association is spearheaded by village elders including Reverend Gcobani Vika – one of its stalwart pioneers.

Goboti Administrative Area is on the outskirts of Engcobo town, nestled in the scenic valley of the R61 between Mthatha and Komani. It falls in the Dr AB Xuma Local Municipality named after the renowned ANC leader whose homestead lies on the banks of the Umgwali river – the “source of life” for the majority of Goboti residents.”¹

The village is 10 000 hectares (sub-divided into 5 hamlets) and is home to approximately 1000 households. The area is blessed with fertile soil, abundant fresh water, indigenous forests, animals (cattle, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, chickens and pigs), and wattle plantations. The area is also well known for wheat, maize, potatoes, butternut, beetroot, cabbage, sorghum, and stone fruit production enabled by abundant fresh water from the river and nearby Mngcozo mountains.

¹ GRA Strategic Plan, 2024 - 2029

Creating a Conscious Community

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) led by Steve Biko germinated in this area of the former Transkei in the 1960s and early 1970s, and popularised a unique form of conscious leadership in political, labour and religious structures - including the Methodist Church of South Africa (MCSA) which was established in this area in the late 1800s.

The history of the MCSA is not without controversy. After Gcobani completed Grade 12 in 1975 in Mthatha, he worked in a factory as an accounting clerk for the South African Railways and Harbour Company whilst being inducted into politics as an active youth leader. In 1980, called to church Ministry, he began a parallel journey of discovering liberation theology in MCSA.



South Africa's policies of apartheid were mirrored in the MCSA itself. Although the church adopted an anti-apartheid stance with its 1958 mandate ‘to be One and Undivided’; it has had to navigate double standards, internal factions, and institutional contradictions over decades to become one of the largest and most influential churches in Southern Africa today, and a key player in South Africa's democracy.² Bishop Don Dabula has been instrumental in leading the church through these transitional years and is another esteemed mentor of Rev Vika who advocated that the church rejects rhetoric in favour of practical action. The MCSA today continues to encourage critical self-introspection and social transformation in pursuit of ‘Social Holiness’ - the heart of Methodist teaching.

This brief snapshot gives us insight into the maturity of Goboti leaders who have managed complex and contradictory forces for decades, whilst promoting liberation theology and a spirit of Africanism. Leading from the intersection of potent historic forces requires resilience and a form of transcendental leadership that can accommodate divergent views whilst harnessing the many opportunities that abound in Eastern Cape today.

² MCSA is a foundational member of the World Council of Churches and has provided leadership for the South African Council of Churches, the Church Unity Commission and All Africa Conference of Churches since the advent of South Africa's democracy – www.methodist.org.za

"The village has blessed me with very, very good leaders, some (of whom) went to school with me... Their wisdom - which is God-given wisdom, knowledge gained from school, that you get from the village, and their experience - I think those are some of the things that we have built on." (Rev Vika)



Formation

"Renewal in South Africa is impossible without the rediscovery of what it means to be a human being and that is only possible within the context of community." (Dr Stanley Mogoba)

In 1995, as South Africa embarked on its transitional democracy, a few men gathered during a ceremony at Rev Vika's homestead to discuss development possibilities for Goboti. A vision began to emerge of a self-organised community that could meet government halfway in addressing basic needs and supporting co-operative governance at the village level.

This inspired a consultative process which seeded GRA's establishment as a 'development arm' of Goboti:

"A small group of elders came together. We talked and then we agreed. We said let's take this to a bigger meeting and then we called the villagers... The majority supported it. It was not easy, but we (eventually) had the full backing of the village." (Rev Vika)

The villagers identified their priorities and basic infrastructure was emphasised in the first few years resonating with government's service delivery focus:

"(We) knew for a fact that we don't have a road here, we don't have clean water, we don't have sanitation - all of those. So there was a rallying point." (Rev Vika)

GRA was registered as a non-profit association in 1995 and its pioneers galvanised the community through meetings and critical engagements:

"We had to do conscientisation, underground conscientisation - without other people being aware that they are being conscientised! The major aspect in development, is human development - that is the key. To help people to be aware of who they are and what is around them in terms of their assets." (Rev Vika)

These consultation processes established a culture of transparency and consensus based decision-making. Growing tolerance and understanding amongst villagers has also been key:

"We brought that spirit of activism in the village and then we gave people the latitude to lead... I remember one meeting where somebody was saying something that was extremely irrelevant. But I looked at the wisdom of the Chairperson who said: "The point you are raising is extremely important. And I think it needs to be digested by the Executive Committee first before it comes here." That was the most brilliant way of brushing aside something that was going to take us off the track. (This is how) we built the organization." (Rev Vika)

The Mustard Seed

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed... Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds perch in its branches."³

In 1997, encouraged by Bishop Mogoba, Rev Vika decided to advance his studies abroad. He travelled to Europe, Britain and then settled in Scotland where he completed a Master's Degree in Theology, Development and Culture at the University of Edinburgh. It was during this time, at a chance meeting at a local church, that he met Jenny Quinn. Impressed by his charisma and tenacity, she rallied behind his vision. When the church had raised enough funds to offer Rev Vika a PhD scholarship, he proposed: "let's invest this money in community development".

Together, they set up the Friends of Goboti Trust in 2006 and pursued a partnership that spanned 20 years, supporting village-led projects. Groups as big as 21 would come from Scotland to Goboti on a learning exchange to work on projects together. During these years, the Goboti community through GRA restored the Church, established a senior Primary School with five classrooms and built a Community Centre which they named after Jenny Quinn.

³ Matthew 13:31-32

In addition to growing Goboti's ecology and infrastructure, there was parallel emphasis on preserving social and cultural assets. Friends of Goboti donated resources like library books for the school, netball and football kits, a PA system, keyboard and drums. Goboti today has an iSicathamiya Acapella Choir, youth groups, crafters and various sport codes. The Primary School also offers arts, drama, music, and ballet, serving as a cultural hub for students.

This North-South partnership between Goboti and Edinburgh was captured in a book by Jenny Quinn based on the parable of 'The Mustard Seed', sharing how a simple conversation between two people could seed a small idea that became so transformative.⁴

"From the first inspiration that persuaded her church to donate receipts from monthly after-service coffees, to the formation of a registered charity for which many fundraising events have taken place...Today Jenny launched her book, in which she tells how, like the mustard seed, from which a large plant will grow from the small beginnings a great deal has been achieved."⁵

⁴ Jenny Quinn, Reverend Gcobani Vika (2011): Seed – A Story of a Partnership with Goboti Village of South Africa through the eyes of a Scot

⁵ 14 June 2015, That Will Do! That Will Do – Concert for Goboti



Throughout these years, Rev Vika travelled widely and expanded his professional experience⁶, whilst playing a leadership role within MCSA and Council of Churches. He was also part of crafting the Anti-Poverty Strategy for Eastern Cape which has consciousness-building as a core element. It was during his time in provincial government that he connected with Nokuzola Magida – a development facilitator who is equally passionate about 'conscientisation' as a community development approach. Although she has not visited Goboti in person yet, she has been instrumental advising GRA leadership and supporting their 'conscientisation agenda'.

Conscious leadership, active citizenship, and community led natural resource management are the golden threads in GRA's story and a focal point of Rev Vika's leadership.

⁶ Rev Vika has served as Provincial Director of the Department of Social Development (Anti-Poverty Unit/ Stakeholder Liaison), Provincial Director of the South African Microfinance Apex Fund (SAMAF); Deputy Director (Biodiversity Management) within the Department of Environmental, Cultural Affairs and Sport; Rev Vika has served as Provincial Director of the Department of Social Development (Anti-Poverty Unit/ Stakeholder Liaison), Provincial Director of the South African Microfinance Apex Fund (SAMAF); Deputy Director (Biodiversity Management) within the Department of Environmental, Cultural Affairs and Sport;

Inspiring a Shared Vision

When Rev Vika returned to South Africa, he came home enriched with knowledge, networks, and an inspired vision:

"When I went to Germany and looked at the rural countryside of Bavaria and when I went to the UK and looked at the rural countryside there, I said to myself: 'These are the same kind of areas like ours, but these are well developed.' And when I say 'well developed,' I'm not talking about skyscrapers and things like that. I'm talking about a place where you can see that people are living life in all its fullness. And that's probably a vision of a better life for all people that keeps me on this journey." (Rev Vika)

Goboti is truly blessed with abundant natural resources and layers of wisdom inherited from pioneering generations. The oldest living resident is now 97 years and in the early days of GRA's formation he shared these cautionary words:

"He said to us—and that has remained vivid in my mind: 'This vision that you are bringing here is way above the skies. You must be patient. Not everybody is going to be able to cling to the vision because they can't even see it - they can't imagine it.' (Rev Vika)

In 2011, GRA approached the Walter Sisulu University's Centre for Rural Development to assist the village to map its assets and produce a strategic plan. Prof Luswazi was a lecturer and the University's Registrar before becoming the Founding Director of the Centre. She responded positively:

"We made an offer to do a tour of the Goboti area to be introduced to resources, whatever resources there are in that area which can be instrumental as a basis for development projects that are likely to emerge. The second step would then be community strategic planning so that they could have a formal, well thought through and research-based plan." (Prof Luswazi)

This was a turning point for GRA, which established a long term relationship with Prof Luswazi and this well positioned institution. What was particularly illuminating was the discovery of rich cultural and natural assets in Goboti and its untapped heritage – like the dilapidated home of Dr David Xuma, South Africa's first medical doctor and a founder of the ANC; fallow fields and valleys where orchards once flourished, hills speckled with Aloe and, most surprisingly, caves with Khoisan artefacts:

"I saw a sign written of Dr David Xuma, and we learnt that this was the home of one of the founders of the ANC and the first black medical doctor in South Africa who came from Goboti. We could see the foundation of the hut, and I said to myself if Goboti is the home of Xuma in the same

way that Qunu is the home of Mandela - a lot can centre around his name....Then we drove into Goboti and we saw lots and lots of maize fields lying fallow ...We moved on and suddenly there was aloe along the hills, a lot of aloe ... I asked - what are you doing with this aloe? ...As we were moving around, we were also conversing and what came up was that Goboti has caves – this was amazing! Khoisan caves and they said that the paintings can still be seen...I always thought such caves were around the Karoo, I did not know that they are also here in Eastern Cape. That excursion gave us a lot of insight." (Prof Luswazi)



The Strategic Planning process brought youth and elders together and shifted GRA's thinking from a welfare mentality addressing needs to a focus on assets.

"We were beginning to ask ourselves now- what is it that we have here? We looked at our land, water, clay, variety of grasses, indigenous forest and plantations. We decided let's move from a welfare to a developmental approach." (Rev Vika)

The abundance of aloe, clay and stone was highlighted and especially the potential for stone fruit revival, which was once Goboti's mainstay:

"I looked at the gardens - many of them lying fallow and I saw trees blooming, but you could see that they are no longer as rich as they used to be. I asked: "Why do I see peach trees?" and they said: "We used to have a lot of fruit here – peaches, apricots, plums, grapes." What happened? I was told that the migrant labor system drew men out (of the village) and women were left behind. They had to cope, marking the beginning of the downfall of agriculture in the area. This history points out what is possible – a revival." (Prof Luswazi)

There was an initial focus on infrastructural development in the first few years, with GRA proactively seeking strategic partners that could advance Goboti's development, reputation, and positioning in the Eastern Cape.

Strategic Framework

"Let us all wake up from our slumber, roll up our sleeves and make our democracy meaningful by entering into programs that will drive us towards self-reliance." (Bishop Koliswa Nikelo, GRA Chairperson, February 2024)

Goboti's strategy was revised in 2024 with economic viability and food security as its two key pillars. The revised strategic framework for the next five years (2024 – 2029) is as follows:

Vision

A world class rural village

Mission

To promote healing and transformation through the Green Revolution

Aims

- To transform all the arable land into green fields and orchards
- To erect silos and build a factory for agro-processing
- To establish a factory for creative industries
- To establish timber and furniture Industries
- To combat crime

- To transform Goboti into a tourist destination
- To promote sport and recreation
- To promote education from ECD to post matric.
- To promote health
- To ensure sound financial administration
- To build a capable Human Resource

Core Industries

GRA has established a primary co-operative as a subsidiary structure for economic development. The co-op has grown its membership to 163 households, each paying R50 (per annum). These member contributions amount to approximately R100 000 self generated income for Goboti's development per year. Core industries will include:

- Primary Agriculture
- Agro-processing
- Creative Industries
- Timber Industries
- Tourism and Cultural Affairs
- Livestock Management

In terms of governance, GRA intends to improve how they operate and incorporate stringent business principles for economic viability. Primary Agriculture is its first priority.



Resource Mobilisation

"What is important is that there must be self-initiative. For me - that is a change of mindset. Instead of waiting for other people to come and do for them, they (Goboti) do for themselves... Planting fields, coming together and then fencing the fields - their fields. It shows that togetherness." (Zola)

The Goboti community have co-invested in development projects from the onset. Whether contributing time, knowledge, skills, making bricks, harvesting natural resources or providing labour. This principle of co-investment has added value - multiplying local assets whilst demonstrating agency and active citizenship at village level.

GRA's commitment to its goals and resource mobilisation efforts have also attracted many visitors, neighbouring communities and co-investors. In 2024, the Eastern Cape Premier donated 15 sewing machines (including 3 industrial machines) and in July 2024, the Eastern Cape Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR) contributed a tractor and farming implements, supporting Goboti's inclusion as a pilot site for Ilima Labantu.⁷

⁷ Ilima Labantu is an agricultural development of provincial government to revive the rural economy and address food security. Strategies include: research; education and training; and co-investing resources to drive rural



"The incredible self-sustaining greening of Goboti village, driven by Reverend Gcobani Vika and the Friends of Goboti, has seen the villagers combat poverty and grow their food to improve food security, demonstrating the power of community action and resilience." ⁸

Goboti's Green Revolution

It was an article about Goboti's 'Green Revolution' in the Daily Maverick that caught Ikhala's Director Bernie Dolley's eye as she routinely scanned the media for good news stories.

"Estelle Ellis wrote an article about Rev Gcobani some time last year. It was about this Reverend driving development and their slogan was: 'Nobody in the village will go hungry' because they will use their assets and their land... I realised that this man gets it - here's an ABCD story. I contacted Estelle who said: "Bern, meet him - I am completely blown away by what this man has done." (Bernie)

development and bridge the urban/ rural divide – Eastern Cape Planning Commission, Eastern Cape Vision 2030 – Provincial Development Plan.

⁸ Heather Robertson: Letter from the DM168 Editor

Bernie called him and since that first contact in 2024, there have been many conversations and critical engagements. Ikhala gave a once off grant to GRA for farming inputs and fencing. Whilst Bernie and Rev Vika share a deep respect and appreciation for the leadership of the other, it is remarkable that they have yet to meet in person.

Becoming the 'Fruit Basket' of the Region

In this second strategic phase, the mission of Goboti is to become the 'fruit basket' of the region. The leadership has introduced a brilliant and unique profit-share model to drive this programme:

- Land owners will get 20%
- GRA will receive 60% of profits
- Labour and administration the remaining 20%⁹
- For future agro-processing, GRA will retain 80% of profits for sustainability and the remaining 20% will go towards labor.

⁹ The same ratio of 80/20 will also apply to Creative industries, Timber industries and Tourism initiatives.



This landmark decision to practice Usufruct¹⁰ as part of integrated land management is most intriguing. Villagers are rallying around this clarion call and a significant portion of arable land has already been allocated:

"We started what we call the Green Revolution," Vika said. "For now this is the mainstay of our development.... Every garden in the village is being used, whether fenced or not, we make a plan as best we can... We must be able to look after ourselves." (Vika cited in Daily Maverick)

The fact that the community has started small, trusting that in pursuing the 'low hanging fruits' success will follow:

"What struck me was that the people take small steps in the right direction. They didn't start by ploughing 800 hectares and planting, not knowing what to do with it. They started small...they have already shown that they can do something before they get government assistance. They decided they want to be people that are thinking big and doing big things."¹¹

If successful, Goboti may offer the development sector and rural Eastern Cape a practical and economically viable model of village led development.

¹⁰ A temporary right to use and derive income or benefit from someone else's property.

¹¹ Estelle Ellis, Cape Talk

A Circular Economy

"People depend on external food producers who make money – Spar, Pick 'n Pay, they are now trading all over – this is something that must be debated as part of Goboti's programme." (Prof Luswazi)

Another important element of Goboti's sustainability is to grow a circular (solidarity) economy. This is not easy in our globalised society where rural areas are still exploited or caught up in a compelling consumerist culture. When Prof Luswazi first came to visit Goboti over a decade ago, she was shocked for example to learn about how aloe was exploited at that time. Entrepreneurs from Gqeberha collected buckets of aloe, paying a mere R20 per bucket to the women who harvested them. These observations were key and sparked important conversations around medicinal plants, financial freedom and sovereignty.

At the same time, GRA's leaders are willing to tackle difficult conversations head on and challenge the consumerist culture that has seeped in to village life over the past decades, encouraging villagers to consider how they can generate and distribute income to boost the local economy:

"(We) raised the culture of consumerism and how this is related...When people get stipends - what do they buy with their stipends? And does that money circulate locally or does that money go out into other areas? ...We were trying to get to the mind-set of the people." (Rev Vika)

Challenges

"I do lament the fact that the country has taken the kind of direction that it has taken now. From the onset I was quite critical of how democracy was introduced. What has been damaged now in South Africa, almost irreparably is the killing of the work ethic, the legacy of hard work. When you come to people and promise them, saying: 'we promise you jobs,' then people started folding their arms and looked to government." (Rev Vika)

GRA's leaders have been consistent in their efforts over the past two decades to inspire the village and bring strategic direction. Yet are still individuals in the community who are cynical, dissatisfied, or overtly disruptive. Some are even suspicious, largely because of broken government promises and failed development initiatives. Like the contractors who built RDP homes in Goboti, leaving 50 unfinished. The Department of Social Development funded an irrigation project which has faltered since the funding cycle concluded. And provincial government has promised to upgrade the main road for two decades, but has yet to start. This can fuel pessimistic attitudes:

"Some were suspicious and we couldn't blame them. They knew that for years these things have been tried and the village never saw any developments... I must not sound like it was rosy. There were those with suspicions that this will never work..." (Rev Vika)

The 'service delivery' model adopted by government has been largely 'top down' and there are many 'white elephants' scattered across the Eastern Cape landscape. There are also strict protocols to be followed, and Goboti has both confused and impressed the establishment through their self-initiative - disrupting the status quo:

"Traditional leadership looked at us with a sharp eye because they saw us developing but they did not know how we are making it. Usually in rural areas, everything must go through the local chief and then it goes to government and so on...We side-stepped traditional leadership as we had tried and saw they are not going to help us and we went straight to the government...They really appreciated and embraced what we were doing." (Rev Vika)

Starting so early with co-investment from abroad could potentially create a level of donor dependency or an exaggerated status, where it might seem that Goboti is well funded, which is not the case. Role players have also brought competing paradigms which can disturb or even destroy local initiative:

"This role player will come with its ideology, confusing the people and that is why development is not sustaining ... There have been other initiatives introduced in the villages that were unsuccessful. They would easily point out those activities...(and) say: "Okay, even this one is

trying to trap you, like the other people. So why go there?" It's easy for the people, especially educated people, to plant the ants of mistrust." (Zola)

Goboti is well aware of how funding and opportunity can provoke competition, jealousy and conflict in the village that often persists well beyond the ending of project cycles and social contracts. Furthermore, farming does not bring quick yields. It requires commitment and sacrifice in the short term for long term gains and consistently motivating people is an ongoing challenge:

"People think money is a good thing, but it can be very dangerous unless it is controlled by the community and does not divide...When there's such a level of poverty and you are going to say come and work in the fields...When the fields were just barren and there was no hope of getting any yield soon to sell in a quicker time...It's very difficult. It needs a lot of motivation from the very onset. ... We would really make them believe in themselves - that they can do it.(Zola)

For this reason, GRA deliberately pursues projects that can build solidarity and that bring community wide benefit:

"At the very beginning, we looked for something that was going to bind us together. When we talked about a project, we couldn't talk about something that is going to benefit one person. And so, when we had money, we thought, let's rebuild the Methodist Church - we were all brought up and grew up in that church." (Rev Vika)

Shifting Limiting Mind-sets

"Dichotomies between 'uneducated' (and 'educated') became a factor. Some of the people who were educated at that time like teachers were reluctant or unwilling to be led by people with less education.We would sit and face them and say: 'We are not looking for graduates, we are looking for people who are able as leaders to bring people together, that is the most important thing.'" (Rev Vika)





In Goboti's story, unlike the others featured in this publication, the village is small and relatively homogenous. Residents share a common ethnicity and language, unlike Hofmeyr's mixed microcosm. Yet even here and in spite of GRA's efforts to be inclusive, there are hierarchies and divisions which persist. Men continue to hold dominant positions and it has been difficult to retain women and youth in GRA's leadership. The slow rhythms of rural life resist change and can encourage complacency:

"People regard men as the heads of families, so they will also be heads even in the projects...It could have a negative effect at times because you find that that a man will be there and not even be knowing much about the program. So now it's a leader that does not have direction." (Zola)

Goboti's leadership proactively challenge social division, inequality and limiting mind-sets. Most importantly, GRA leaders are vigilant and continue to focus attention on what will unite rather than divide the village:

"We're going in one direction, we're trying to avoid everything that is going to cause divisions amongst us....We want to always be together, to on the same road all the time - so we watch against anything that's going to divide us." (Rev Vika)

Nurturing a Second Layer

Youth in Goboti (and South Africa) today are from a different era and do not necessarily have an activist orientation like the village forebearers. Most are unwilling to be part of the GRA Co-op, as they are not prepared to work without getting a stipend. Goboti is also not isolated from the scourges of drugs, crime and gangsterism that have intensified, especially in Mthatha, over the past few years. Youth development, especially sport, arts and cultural activities, offer an alternative, encouraging youth activation to invest in a second layer of leadership:

"It has been challenging to attract and retain young people and cultivate a second layer of leadership. GRA has begun to break their non-involvement, though sport. There are currently 50 boys involved in football who compete at district level. 30 girls are engaged in netball and recently won a local tournament rewarded with netball kits. Although sport grounds are unsatisfactory, sport development is integrated into the culture and rhythm of community life." (Mr Bonile)

There is a concern in Goboti about the leaders of the future. Interestingly some youth have joined 'the Green Revolution', adding song and positive slogans to revive a spirit of solidarity. This is refreshing - bringing new energy and hope for the future:



"I would like to hear new slogans now that encourage people to understand their situation, to recognise in themselves that they have the power to change...We need positive slogans that get the people of Goboti getting up each day to proudly work, rather than looking to government... Rev Vika phoned me after they started working with the tractor and he said the youth have come up with a slogan – Siyakulalemasimi which literally means we shall spend the night out in the corn fields, suggesting we shall work day and night... that is a very potent statement. It told me that they have understood the goal of rediscovery of agricultural production and that they are committing themselves not just in theory but in practice." (Prof Luswazi)

Celebrating Milestones

Rural life waxes and wanes with its own rhythms. It has been important for GRA to also establish rhythms of institutional life and grow a coherent organisational culture. Most importantly has been finding a balance between hard work and celebration:

"We have strengthened the organization with events - we had milestones and there was a lot to



celebrate... I think that's the most important aspect. When people come together in celebration, they show their talent in terms of music, in terms of what they can do. So, that has brought the community together, growing that spirit of togetherness." (Rev Vika)

The Goboti community is proud of its Strategic Plan which is gaining traction and recognition as a potential model for village-led development. There are many who have tirelessly pursued this vision over the past twenty years. We honour their efforts and enduring legacy: Silumnko Sibondana*, Mutu Mbunjana*, Pakamisa Qoba, Monde Nomnganga, Nozukile Nkomfe, Nozukile Qulusela, Mbuzeli Ntshiba* and Nosiya kudumisa Vika*.¹²

Chrysalis

During this phase, the caterpillar undergoes a dramatic transformation inside a protective shell called a chrysalis. It develops wings, legs, antennae and other adult features through metamorphosis until the butterfly is ready to emerge

Goboti's leadership has a deeply rooted sense of responsibility to co-create South Africa's

democracy. In the face of negativity fueled by development disappointments, GRA still perseveres twenty years on and its stalwarts continue to play a pivotal role in nurturing the organisation, combining gentle and inclusive guidance with conscious activism. Other villages and also high level leaders within provincial government are looking now to Goboti elders for guidance. GRA is at a precipice – continuing its localised focus and firm footing on the fertile soils of the village, whilst considering how to heed the call to support regional and even national developments.

Like the cocooning chrysalis, this balancing act will require a protective layer that can hold GRA stable, and at the same time support its leaders to spread their wings for the greater good.

Reflections

The story of Goboti Residents Association is a story of servant leadership sustained by resilience. The persistence and consistent commitment to transformation have steadily grown GRA and its community, bringing recognition within the District and beyond. Rev Vika has never let go of his home or community, although he is offered

many opportunities both locally and abroad. He has remained steadfast, devoted and consistent in placing confidence in his community and their many assets as the foundation on which to build a liberated and abundant future.

Goboti's leadership push a conscientisation agenda that is rare to see – healing past trauma, challenging inferiority complexes, and building unity. Although Goboti is not yet thinking with 'one mind', they are making positive strides in the right direction and have established favourable conditions where development can flourish. The support of partners and co-investors including Friends of Goboti, Centre for Rural Development and government agencies have accelerated growth in this village, and strengthened its sovereignty enabling villagers to drive development on their own terms and through its own efforts rather than simply 'waiting for government to provide'. As a result, GRA has gained traction and built credibility. The organisation and its leadership are also well positioned to play a pivotal role in the region and positively influence the development trajectory.

GRA is well aware of the need to actively retain youth in the village and cultivate a second layer of conscious leadership that can sustain Goboti's into the future and is taking positive steps in that direction.

"From Goboti we learn that even today in spite of the destruction from apartheid, the potential is there. We need to go into the rural development space with a positive attitude and we need to have confidence in rural people – they know their history and they will guide us towards sources of change." (Prof Luswazi)

¹²

* deceased

Questions

- How can GRA protect and sustain its structure and ensure its relevance into the future?
- How can a 'Green Revolution' be pursued in an ethical, environmentally conscious and sustainable way?
- How can elders and youth work together to combine the former's wisdom and experiential knowledge with the latter's energy, vibrancy and technical acumen?
- What role can social, political and religious institutions play in advancing transformative development and what are the best institutional arrangements that enable strengths based and citizen-led development?
- How can GRA leaders remain rooted in Goboti and at the same time heed the call from others to share their expertise and influence regionally?
- How best can leaders and active citizens 'heal a nation' that experiences pervasive disillusionment and loss of confidence in political leadership?
- How can a strengths based 'conscientisation agenda' with positive slogans be integrated to regenerate South Africa's in its next development phase?



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In the Eastern Cape village of Goboti, nobody goes hungry



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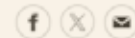
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News

Leith Festival concert to raise funds for school project in African village

By The Newsroom



Published 14th Jun 2011, 12:38 BST | Updated 15th Jun 2011, 11:42 BST

DRAGON boats and a rural community in South Africa may not appear to have much in common.

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Case Study # 3: The Co-Op Community Trust





Introduction

The story of the Co-op Community Trust is a very different story to what we have presented so far. Here, we have a Corporate Social Investment (CSI) arm which was established by The Co-op – a leading agricultural business with its head office in Humansdorp, Eastern Cape, approximately 90km from Gqeberha, its nearest city. The Co-op operates throughout Eastern Cape, Western Cape, and Limpopo Provinces providing products and services to its membership of farmers, and to the public through Co-op stores and petrol stations. The Co-op is 100% farmer owned and currently has 1600 members.

This case study offers a different perspective of asset based and citizen led development in that the Trust itself was not initiated by a pioneer (as in the case of Hugs of Hope and Goboti Resident's Association), but is a subsidiary of an existing company. Willem (Willie) Oosthuizen, was appointed as its Manager in 2016 – the first (and for a long time only) staff member, who has brought vast experience to the organisation and a firm conviction that strengths based and community led development is the preferred approach. Although he did not initiate the Trust per se, he is its pioneering leader.

Also, here we have a story that is not localised like Hofmeyr and Goboti but stretches across the Eastern Cape and soon will extend its reach to the Southern Cape as well. This case study is a story of scope and scale in terms of the number of projects, partnerships and thousands of people already impacted.

We will learn about Willie's humble, grounded, and gentle leadership style that fosters relationships at a deeply personal level. Yet at the same time he has capacity to hold complexity and have enormous reach. The importance of cultivating a social network of likeminded people and organisations, forging collaborative partnerships and upholding solid ethics, is highlighted here, as well as leadership clarity rooted in faith.

The Co-op has an interesting history that spans eighty years. It was originally created as a milling company in 1944 to support local grain farmers. It rebranded itself in 2013 as 'The Co-op' extending its mandate. The culture of the company is founded on solid values that incorporate faith, integrity, transparency, inter-dependence and community responsibility. It is this sense of responsibility, supported by South Africa's CSI regulations¹ that encouraged the Co-op to establish the Co-op Community Trust in 2016.

¹ In terms of the South Africa's Codes of Good (Corporate) Practice of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2007, a company's CSI contribution should be at least 1% of net profit after taxes.



At its height, the company had over 1000 permanent staff including technical experts in finance, agronomy, agriculture and engineering. It experienced internal challenges in the past few years, resulting in mass retrenchments coinciding with the same time period that the Co-op Trust was emerging. Oftentimes, CSI is the first cutback when there is a corporate restructuring, and whilst the Co-op's staff complement is now approximately 600 people (almost half of what it was), the company has remained steadfast in its CSI commitment and paradoxically embraced a strengths-based paradigm during a turbulent time.

Pathways to Greatness

"Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve." Martin Luther King, Jr.

We start this story on Willie's grandfather's farm outside Meyerton, where from the youngest age, he realised a deep love and connection to nature, people and Christ's teachings. Apartheid laws encouraged social division, discrimination and suspicion of 'the other'. Yet Willie easily interacted with the farmworkers and formed friendships with their children, finding common humanity beyond the 'colour bar'. He was deeply affected by the levels of poverty he observed and felt deep compassion:

"When I was six years old, I walked on my grandfather's farm (where) we played a lot with

the children (of farmworkers). One day, I went to their houses and I looked at the circumstances there. I was just overcome by (what would you say), compassion... I started stealing my clothes and food from my mother's storeroom and took it there... Later, I realized that this is not how you do it but this is who I am." (Willie)

Willie grew up in a business environment, working at his father's hardware store from Grade 7. He found that routine work was tedious and hungered for more. He studied Sociology and Industrial Psychology with great interest, finding the evolution of society to be fascinating. It was his studies in Industrial Psychology that led him towards Community Development which has been a calling and passion ever since.

Willie openly shares his personal story - of his university days when he behaved recklessly and almost 'lost' himself. He experienced a mystical moment of reckoning where he knew with every fibre of his being that he needed to stop, repent and choose a different pathway. He has always been religious, but from this moment, he recalls that he surrendered completely to Christ with a life of service.

In 1991, newly married, Willie and his wife Marie moved to Potchefstroom where he was employed as a Community Developer in a Rural Development Foundation. The organisation had never recruited someone straight out of University

and he is grateful that they gave him a chance in spite of his lack of experience. Initially, he 'followed the book' in terms of what he had been taught – conducting needs assessments, analysing problem profiles and crafting solutions to get 'buy in' from participating communities. He led a team that was somewhat successful in 'addressing needs' and there were some tangible impacts, but Willie felt disillusioned over time. Using logic, he made a pivotal decision that would shift his paradigm away from needs and problems, and towards a strengths-based practice:

"In those years, we were taught you do need based community development. So we did everything according to the book. We went into communities, different communities and got the leaders together ... We asked them questions - what are the problems and what are the needs and then we categorised them. We were very good at identifying and making plans to address all those needs. And we were very enthusiastic. Of course, after five years - I found that that this is going nowhere." (Willie)

A needs-based or 'problem-based' development approach will inevitably hit a ceiling after years of addressing needs as the approach encourages limited ('poverty') thinking as people become preoccupied with seemingly insurmountable problems. It can also encourage competition for 'scarce resources', jealousy, dependency, gatekeeping and entitlement attitudes – ironically counter-productive to the development effort.

Shifting the Paradigm

Willie was quick to realise the limitations of needs based development and its dehumanising effect, so he decided to try something else – to base their planning on community strengths. This was a watershed moment and set the tone for what would follow. His faith is a bedrock and compass, and confirmed that he was moving in the right direction:

"We live under a command to make the best of what we are doing, to manage this earth as best we can...We are here to work and manage whatever was given to us...(to) look for those gifts and those treasures." (Willie)

During a period of 'trial and error', Willie discovered ABCD as a well-researched and documented approach and was excited to have a name for what he was intuitively doing. He realised that even as a family, they were embracing this philosophy at home. Home-schooling eight children, Willie and his wife were constantly affirming their talents and potentials through what he now terms as 'strengths based education'. They nurtured and supported their oldest son's passion in music. Their second son, a natural electrician, was given an endless supply of broken items to fix...



Prioritising what is really important in life comes through clearly in conversations with him. Having been a work horse for a number of years and almost experiencing burnout in his early working life, he now approaches each day in a disciplined and grounded manner to attend positively to these priorities:

"In my 30s, I was almost burnt out. Then I came to my senses and made certain decisions that are still sticking. My highest priority is God, so I spend time every day – my first two hours reading, praying - quiet time to meditate on what I've learnt. Secondly, it's my wife ... and then the family, the children. (For) the past 10 years, I don't take work home at night – never!...We eat together, spend a lot of time around the table. That was also a decision." (Willie)

This is an organic flow of integrated development – personal, family, community development - that is appreciative of everyone's innate gifts, talents and potentials. This development from the 'inside-out' interweaves both at home and at work:

"With that (strengths-based schooling), and then asset based community development, (combined with) my own thinking about these things, influenced what we were doing in community development -in groups, discovering people's strengths, (with) individuals and focusing on that - one thing led to another." (Willie)

Kouga Together

In 2010, the family moved to Jeffrey's Bay and Willie soon joined the Joshua Project (a local faith based NGO), first as a volunteer and then Project Manager. It was here that he met Bernie and Ikhala Trust for the first time. Ikhala had a number of grantees in this resort town including Mpendulo Savings Club who had requested an ABCD workshop to unite NGOs in this small town. In 2014, Ikhala facilitated a 3 day ABCD workshop which sparked 'Kouga Together' – a loose aspirational network to unite organisations in this area, that still continues today.

Willie experienced the training as 'mind blowing', solidifying for him that ABCD will be the way 'we do things'.

"(The) ABCD mindset, changed (the) bigger picture, it changed the thinking (of) a lot of NPOs in this little municipal area...They started to talk not about a donation mentality, but rather investment mentality. Over years this influence is bringing change forward, and then you see it going right down to community level." (Willie)



Ikhala continued to support this collective over a number of years with follow-up workshops, mentoring and responsive (co) investment. It is important to emphasise the immense and compounded benefit of capacity and consciousness-building. Although most of these local organisations are faith based, with shared values, competition for resources had created competition and 'silos' which diluted the potential impact of their work. The ABCD training cut through this dynamic, encouraging the group to cultivate unity and positivity based on a shared developmental paradigm.

Formation

Willie successfully applied for the position of Co-op Community Trust Manager when it was advertised and was tasked to set up the organisation. He brought in a wide range of skills and a wealth of experience:

"I was coming through all the sectors - first, I was in community development as a community developer, and then I was in tourism for seven years, in the business environment as well. And then I worked for almost twenty years as a consultant for municipalities and for Eskom doing social impact studies... then I decided I'm going to work now at community level... So coming through all of that with that experience, it was easy for me to start at the Co-op." (Willie)

Although a strengths-based approach is not yet mainstreamed, the Co-op welcomed the philosophy and Willie was given the latitude to shape the trajectory of the Trust from the onset:

"I had a clean slate to start with and the support of top management...and obviously then from the beginning, I influenced it with an asset based approach." (Willie)

Willie designed the start-up process in an organic and developmental way. In the first year, he spent most of his time listening and learning from communities and organisations in the Co-op's area of operation. Oftentimes, staff are expected to hit the ground running and implement predetermined plans. Having the space to learn and form genuine relationships (without pushing a fixed agenda) was important.

"It's a journey - I think every situation is different and every community is different. One must go into a community, a situation or a family to learn what is going on here before you can make any recommendations or before you facilitate anything - I think the one of the secrets that I've learnt... to listen." (Willie)

Whilst there were a few activities in that first year (like a Winter School), Willie could do proper groundwork and evolve a strategy built on a solid foundation:

"For the first year, I only visited branches and communities and just basically spoke to people. And, then we developed our strategic plan and put it together...We could really listen to the communities where we are involved and then base our strategic plan on what the community said." (Willie)

The openness and trust displayed by top management and their willingness to learn from Willie's approach is unique and an important theme throughout this story:

"I totally believe in the philosophy that Willie brought to us and it changed how we saw social development If you want to make an impact in the space that Willie occupies in the community, you need to have an understanding. There is no silver bullet and the Management took a very mature view on this." (Rikus)

Building a shared paradigm from the onset paved the way for internal synergy where Management could also benefit from strengths-based thinking and apply this to the company itself:

"It is a mindset...Willie is part of our management meetings and he brings that nuanced view. Articulating this (asset based approach) has definitely rubbed off on the broader Management Team." (Rikus)

Once the building blocks of the Trust were in place, it was easy to form collaborative relationships and strengthen the Co-op's potential to build social capital. It was easy to also draw together some of the individuals and organisations who had championed the 'Kouga Together' network with Ikhala Trust a few years ago. With all the pioneers in this publication, there is a sense of creative freedom in the Co-op's story, where the leader has agency to follow their instincts and bring forward their own strengths. The Trust uniquely also had a resource base to draw from in that its core funding comes from the Co-op, unlike Hugs of Hope or GRA who must seek funding for both core and project costs and thus rely on voluntary staff.

Having a secure measure of core funding in place brings stability to an organisation and financial security in terms of staff retention. At the same time, this has not limited the Trust which can fund-raise across the sector when strategic opportunities arise.

The Trust has a wide area of operation and reach, yet its capacity remains limited to just two full time staff members. As a result of a collaborative outlook, the Trust's strategy thrives on partnerships rather than 'centralised control'. Working in a decentralised manner through a network of symbiotic partners has extended capacity and is a fundamental leadership lessons highlighted through this story. Willie's relaxed leadership style and ABCD orientation has also infused

strengths based thinking into this network, which has brought alignment and a shared practice, springboarding the development process:

"Starting with what you have, or looking at what you have - that can add value, actually kickstarting the momentum of development."
(Lunga – Interview)

The success of the Trust in just a few years demonstrates how a humble leader can play a catalytic and enabling role, by building on assets that already exist.

Strategic Framework

Vision

To enable empowered and prosperous communities in Africa.

Mission

To facilitate sustainable development of our communities applying an asset based approach focussing on socio-economic growth, training and education, health promotion and the elderly, in partnerships with employees, communities and stakeholders within our areas of operation.

Objectives

The objectives set by the Co-op to achieve through the Trust are as follows:

- To invest in the rapid development of community assets;
- To advocate for sustainable community upliftment by unlocking opportunities and addressing socio-economic needs;
- To promote the resilience of children through the Risiha programme².

² RISIHA is a child protection programme of the Department of Social Development aimed at protecting orphans and vulnerable children through, prevention, early intervention and care and support services.





Key Focus Areas

"The Co-op Trust believes the most effective way to deal with all the socio-economic issues at hand, is the rapid development of every region's local assets so that jobs may be created, so that wealth may follow. Training and Education is essential to unlock and grow these opportunities." (Co-op website)

The Trust with its stable institutional base in the Co-op, is extremely well positioned to interface with corporate, government, community and NGO stakeholders. It has strategically aligned with the country's National Development Plan (NDP) and recognises agriculture, tourism and human capital development as foundational pillars for boosting the local (and regional) economy. Key focus areas are:

- Socio-Economic Growth
- Training and Education
- Care of the Elderly
- Health Promotion

It has been important for Willie to emphasise both internally and externally that the Trust is a responsive (co) investor rather than a traditional grantmaker giving donations. Shifting the paradigm from a donation to investment mindset is another important cornerstone:

"I've influenced this institution to think asset based development - we don't even speak about donations. When people come and ask us for a donation, we say we don't give donations -that is a totally disruptive mindset. When you come here, you ask for an investment because we invest in people, in land, in water and in assets that brings development. " (Willie)

Activities

In 2021, the Trust employed Charein Coenraad as an administrator, PR officer and qualified social worker who could work alongside Willie to deepen socio-economic impact. Each day is frenetically busy with Willie and Charein remaining responsive, multi-tasking and methodically moving through layered 'to do' lists - playing multiple roles. Day to day activities are geared towards influencing community-based organisations, projects and municipalities towards asset based development and include:

- Facilitate community conversations and development workshops;
- Facilitate community planning sessions for development;
- Identify compliant NPOs and invest in operational costs;

- Support NPOs with mentoring, training, evaluation, monitoring and compliance;
- Identify ECD teachers and invest in operational costs;
- Organise school workshops and winter schools;
- Promote regenerative farming practices and organic food garden projects;
- Organise work ethic courses;
- Facilitate container based technology education centres and health clinics;
- Actively pursue opportunities for socio-economic investment activities.³

Resource Mobilisation

The Trust gathers revenue from Co-op profits, but has also initiated a fund-raising drive through its 18 retail stores and 7 petrol stations to support development projects. In the beginning, customers were given a choice to contribute a R2 to every transaction, but some resisted and this contribution is now voluntary:

"We introduced a R2 investment system whenever you buy at a co-op branch, and that didn't go well with many people. They either got angry at some of the tellers, and we later stopped asking for that R2 investment. If people now want to invest, they must just do it." (Willie)

³ Extracted from the Co-op Community Trust website: <https://communitydevelopment.co.za/>

Current Projects

The Trust has established a solid network of partners that it supports. Willie now has a small team of staff including a Training Co-ordinator, a Health and Safety Officer and four administrators that he encourages by 'letting them do what they are good at.' There is a strong sense of authenticity here engendered through Willie's personal integrity and principled approach. This ethical commitment to transformation is not always present in CSI:

*"Corporate social investment can't begin and end with a company announcing their involvement in a community project and writing out a cheque. Authenticity is important, and half-hearted initiatives that don't have the support of the corporate mission will do more harm than good."*⁴

The current projects supported by the Trust include:

GF4GF Centre (Somerset-East)

<http://gf4gfc centres.co.za/compass/>

Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic (Jeffreys Bay)

<http://www.hmbc.co.za/>

Timion NPO Jeffreys Bay

<https://www.timion.org/home>

⁴ "Superficial CSI missed opportunity to create shared value", Regan Adams, CEO of RCS, cited at <https://www.moonstone.co.za>, 1/082019

Sakhngomso Creche Project (Tsitsikamma)

Living Waters (Oysterbay)

<https://www.livingwater.net.za>

Rainbow Centre (Kruisfontein)

<https://victory4all.com/>

Cookhouse Children Foundation

<https://cookhousechildrenfoundation.weebly.com/>

Having worked with the ABCD methodology for a few years now, the Co-op Trust has become an ardent advocate, incorporating ABCD in all programmes and this has made a tangible difference to the outcomes achieved:

"Yes, it makes a difference - a big difference. If you go in with asset based development and ask people: What are they proud of? Tell me about your community strengths and assets and help them to think (about these) along the way... So the whole way in which you look at poverty and people is different, because now we look for people to invest in. We don't look for 'poor people that we can help out of trouble'. If we invest in in land, and labour, it will bear fruit. And then poverty will disappear by itself." (Willie)

Importantly, the Trust is also caring for caregivers by investing in stress management, trauma release, and healing workshops as well as support groups. This aspect of development work is often ignored and can only deepen healthy inter-personal connections and support systemic change in the long-term.

The Trust co-invests in the work of partner organisations, but has also mobilised resources through the Social Employment Fund (SEF) for a joint project that cuts across this network. This has enabled the Trust to impact 1000 direct beneficiaries and boost partner organisations as well. This principle of working synergetically, with and through existing structures (rather than competing with them) is a golden thread in the Community Trust's story.

The SEF offers us a good opportunity to look at how an organisation can infuse ABCD practice across a network and in all aspects of project design, including how to measure and value change. We will focus on this specific project in detail, and the findings from the External Evaluation of its first phase.



The Social Employment Fund (SEF)

The Social Employment Fund, managed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) aims to address unemployment by strengthening partnerships with 'whole society' initiatives for scale and impact. The Fund directly support 37 Strategic Implementing Partners (SIPs) working with over 1100 community organisations, networks and structures from 18 – 59 years old combining youth and elders from different communities and cultures.

The Trust as an SIP partnered with schools, educare centres, local organisations and community networks to collectively recruit and manage 1000 participants. ABCD was introduced by Willie as a basis for project design at the conceptual stage, and widely accepted by partners - many of whom had already exposed through the Co-op's sensitisation efforts and co-investment model:

"The Co-op's approach to sustainable community development through the SEF

(Social Enterprise Fund) programme is grounded in the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).....which encourages community members to identify their inherent assets and potential. By emphasizing that individuals are valuable contributors, we help

communities shift from dependency to self-sufficiency. The communities we work with have demonstrated immense dedication in leveraging their existing resources to achieve collective growth." (SEF Theory of Change)

Ikhala, as a longstanding capacity-building partner, was contracted by the Trust to train trainers who could roll out ABCD training across all SEF sites: "He just phoned me and said, we've applied to the SEF fund, and I want Ikhala to do ABCD training in all these communities, because the money on its own is not going to help people to get out of their situations. So that's how we engaged." (Bernie)

Participants were recruited and employed based on their strengths in regenerative farming, environmental, tourism, education, ECD and community development sectors:

"What we did was we asked those NPO's and organisations to appoint community members that they trust ... and to assist them in what they are strong in...Where people just grabbed the opportunity, developed personal action plans and then took it forward." (Willie)

The Trust trained 12 community developers in the first round of SEF to champion ABCD on the ground and support the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) component. A simple, relational approach is being encouraged:

"We motivate our community developer - those that we've trained...we tell them that they don't have to get big crowds and a lot of people together to do asset based development. Just get five people together and talk...talk to one another and try to understand one each other." (Willie)

Lunga Mlangeni is a highly skilled and experienced community worker and youth leader who was recruited a few years ago as a Trustee for the Community Trust. He shares Willie's passion for ABCD as a way of life:

"If Willie didn't notice me as an asset and I didn't notice him as an asset, it would have been easy to just say: "I don't have to deal with this. I don't have to explain myself to you."...It's the value that I know he's added to the communities, the value that I know he will continue to add, and that within himself he carries so much - such a legacy that people can learn from. I hope he sees the same with me – it's just recognising those assets in one another." (Lunga Interview)



We are exploring the theme of #ShiftingthePower through these case studies, and advocating that a strengths-based paradigm can facilitate deep human connection and power-sharing, reflected in the open relationship shared by Lunga and Willie:

"We do have our differences. We have different backgrounds and opinions of how we see the world. But at the end of the day, there's common ground where we can make peace and move ahead ... I think the problem comes when it is not communicated. Then you don't hear the heart ... which I've never experienced with Willie. We've always been able to clear things up very quickly... We've grown, learnt to talk and to approach the uncomfortable places early enough. It's courageous communication." (Lunga)

Measuring and Valuing Change

Ikhala Trust developed a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to support ABCD advocacy and mainstreaming and shares it widely with learning partners. Willie attended an online ABCD and M&E workshop and incorporated this framework as a measuring tool in SEF.⁵

An external evaluator (Michelle Dorfling) who was

⁵ Greenlight is another evaluative tool in SEF providing quantitative household level data to complement ABCD.

exposed to ABCD in the 'Kouga Together' days, was mentored by Ikhala in applying the framework and adapting it for this multi-layered project.

The methodology includes a 'dashboard' as a self-assessment tool with asset areas and outcome statements aligned to the project. Individual assessments were completed at baseline and a follow-up review 12 months later for comparative analysis. Beyond scoring for quantitative data, the methodology is fairly open ended and invites SEF participants to share change stories. This has been most enriching:

"People shared how on this journey, they found what they were really passionate about. And they were given the opportunity to gain confidence and skills they needed to step out. Those that use the program as a stepping stone and not just as a contract for a time and grabbing the finances, but the ones that didn't see it as a 'job' - they saw it and they got it...And look at them now, they're living, they're no longer surviving because they are in a space where they are doing what they love and loving what they do. And that makes all the difference. They come alive." (Michelle)

The results of the end term evaluation of SEFs first funding cycle was positive highlighting growth in all asset areas:

The evaluation has also highlighted key strengths,

challenges and recommendations for SEF, and these are relevant for strengths based development work in general.



Building a Shared Paradigm

Cultivating a shared paradigm is a bedrock for the Co-op Community Trust

and the SEF consortium. It is establishing common ground from the onset and this is strategic and could build a critical mass that positively inspires change.

His whole demure, that humble, personal, friendly, open person that he is... I think his whole people-first way, is just the way he's wired - he sees the person and he looks to see and understand ... he naturally leans towards seeing what is strong, what is good in people and how can we can we strengthen that? And he's open, he doesn't hold onto things, he engages, he invites people in." (Michelle)

This theme was also strongly reflected in the GRA story and its conscientisation efforts over many years to grow unity and active citizenship in Goboti.

Surviving versus Thriving

"There are many others who didn't take that opportunity. So that is the challenge. Some people grab the thinking and then there's change. There's definite change, and you can almost immediately see it. You can see it in their eyes when you're busy with a workshop. And then, some others maybe are enthusiastic for a week or two, and then it just fades away and they forget about that... (and there) are (people who) don't even know what they are proud of...One must look for those treasures, those gifts that is there." (Willie)

Having highlighted the potential that a shared 'life giving' paradigm can bring, there is also entrenched inter-generational poverty creating a culture of apathy including 'surplus powerlessness' – a concept that human beings can sometimes make themselves more powerless than needed and unconsciously block any willingness to invite change or pursue a personal or social vision:⁶

"The reality is that so many people are stuck in survival mode....They live life from one day at a time in the now, because they don't have the headspace or the bandwidth. ... (It is) surplus powerlessness - it's that feeling of apathy that goes to a whole new level because it's in the mind...(where) I give up before I've even started, because the power's been taken out of my hands...How do we create a space where we are restoring agency? Where we are able to choose ...It's about regaining our voice." (Michelle)

ABCD as cross-cutting element in SEF's design and its introduction at the orientation stage is helping to shift some of this thinking at the individual level. This has certainly been supported by practical opportunities in work placements with mentoring, supervision and stipends as incentives.

⁶ Lerner, M. (1991). Surplus powerlessness: The psychodynamics of everyday life . . . and the psychology of individual and social transformation. Humanities Press International.

"Some of them that we've been already partnering with - they've had the message of ABCD. So now, when there's investment coming in - they could actually leverage better and take their operations to better heights. There is though, a lot of groundwork we had to do to try and educate other(s) about ABCD.... There are so many good stories that come out, and there's tangible evidence of the (ABCD) mindset working for us." (Lunga)

Some participants have enthusiastically used SEF as a stepping stone to pay off debts, pursue their studies and upskill, knowing their contracts are for a period of 10 months. Others might have seen SEF as a short-term job and just focused on their stipend, losing momentum as the project concludes or even reverting back into comfort zones during the project cycle. Especially where people may have limited prospects, they may be simply seduced by security.

One example was shared of a participant in the gardening project who was shining as an SEF success story:

"She discovered her(self) and came alive when she shared what she was experiencing... and the profound effect that the project had on her." (Michelle).

At the follow-up assessment she had left SEF and was working as a house-keeper. We see here the tension that many will experience of the dynamic push towards thriving and the familiar pull back to simply surviving.



Reciprocity and Mutual Accountability

As we explore horizontal forms of power sharing, it is important to also explore how to ensure ethical responsibility and accountability when power is disbursed. A decentralised partner driven programme like SEF requires a solid structure and accountability systems that enable power sharing in a responsible and ethical way. Willie's natural belief in the potential of people; participatory leadership style, longstanding working relationships, and shared faith within this established network have largely contributed to growing a solid value base and system for reciprocal accountability. This in turn can distribute and share responsibility - a mark of a healthy collective consciousness:

"I've come to realise that structures of accountability are important and it can take many strategies to achieve accountability. The Community Trust has been quite open and quite transparent. There's nothing that I've felt that is hierarchical ... There's no big decision he could take that I would not know about, or that I would feel strangely manipulated... I think it also has to do with our value system." (Lunga)

"He is very incredible. He understands every situation... When there's a problem, he would find the best solution for that problem. He will

(always) find a way to develop you... Willie is "plat op die aarde mens" – "down to earth... and he fits in everywhere". He is like a chameleon (and) he respects everyone... Such a blessing to have a human being like that, which then also helps everybody else that works with him also want(ing) to always be their best, and step into spaces that are uncomfortable or different." (Mattylyse)

Clashing Mindsets

Similarly to the story of Hugs of Hope, the Co-op Trust also faces resistance to change, endemic in small towns that may have entrenched hierarchy and social division. Whilst the Co-op offers services to farmers and consumers, the Trust is rooted at the grassroots level and not everybody understands or supports this:

"There were many challenges... You still get resistance in many sectors, and resistance (towards) what we are doing and who we are doing (it with) People who live out of the old mindsets, very conservative mindsets that don't give room for new things. So in some of these small towns, you have that." (Willie)

Shared Recognition

If you look at the Co-op website and that of the Community Trust, you do not find them claiming successes alone, but rather emphasising partners and community participants and putting them oftentimes at the forefront. This is refreshing, as sometimes CSI is initiated simply for corporate compliance and publicity.

Ikhala's slogan is 'Money follows Good Things', and this is also true when it comes to allocations. In just a few years, the Trust is gaining recognition for its impact in the region, receiving a community award during this write up of their story:

"On Friday, 27 June, The Co-op was honoured with a community award for our contribution to environmental sustainability and commitment to Kouga. Willie Oosthuizen and Lunga Mlangeni received the award at Kouga Municipality's Community Environmental Awards at Newton Hall, Jeffreys Bay. We dedicate this recognition to our @Social Employment Fund participants, as well as our collaboration with great local partners.



The Power of Storytelling

This round of SEF was implemented at 12 sites, three of which were focused on in the M&E system as pilot sites. At these sites, there was a baseline and two follow-up assessments with 600-700 participants – a sizeable sample. Harvesting change stories as part of the final review was also empowering:

"Stories mean connecting with the person's 'why' - connecting with their heart - the real person. I'm not so interested in what they're doing and how they're doing it. I'm more interested in why they do what they do.... connecting with them as a person (then) I'm seeing you... And once we feel connected and part of (something), there's nothing that can stop us". (Michelle)

Let's look now at two SEF success stories:



Thandiwe's Story

Thandiwe Thule is a Psychology graduate with a passion for child and youth care. She was onboarded as a site supervisor at SEF and placed in a local school. Her experience of SEF has been profound – opening opportunities and serving as a stepping stone for her to pursue postgraduate studies towards becoming an Educational Psychologist. She is currently working in for a cellphone network whilst studying further:

"I've had the privilege to work on projects in my community that have made a huge impact in Humansdorp. Today I am here to reflect a little bit about the lessons and experiences I have learnt along the way. Seeing what the SEF has done in my community first hand as I worked in these localities - I would say that unemployment is a huge problem and SEF bridged that gap ... There was an unbiased selection when it came to age (mixing youth with elders who might be excluded from grants and work opportunities) ... For me, I just finished my studies in 2023 and came to my community in 2024. I heard about this opportunity and applied... When I came I had little experience and he gave me the opportunity to prove myself as I have a degree in Psychology. I love children and was based in schools, having to supervise the daily operations which is gardening, sport codes and teaching assistance... In future I am striving to be an Educational Psychologist, even now I am doing my Honours, and maybe after this I will do Masters and then register myself.

Matthylise's Story

Matthylise Brown is 30 years old and lives in Humansdorp. She is an SEF Site Administrator responsible for four sites: Oyster Bay, St. Francis Bay, Jeffreys Bay and Gamtoos, overseeing 365 participants in school, garden, clinic or community development projects. Her days are filled mostly with administrative and operational tasks and record-keeping, but she is also a motivator who believes in what SEF is seeking to achieve and the ABCD philosophy it promotes:

"We have had a lot of ABCD trainings at all our sites... the site administrator will then organize participants to attend ABCD training, usually over three days.... We have a 'use what you have to get what you want' type of way of doing things. For me, in the beginning it was strange, but as the time went on, I actually could see the point of using what you have – you don't have to go and buy.... It saved me a lot (of money) and taught me a lot, I could use this approach with my child."

With her encouragement, she has supported group engagement and participation, especially 'buy in' at the initial orientation stage:

"In my first training in Hankey...the first day, the participants weren't really participating in the training - they didn't listen....I stepped in at

the end of that first day and I said: 'Guys, this is really important'....at the end of the third day, a lot came to me and said I have so many ideas to even start a business from my own yard, from my own garden....it is amazing how the ABCD training could shift the mind just in three days."

She mentioned how ABCD and other training (eg. counselling) has strengthened the capacity of staff to mentor and support participants, trouble-shooting at the local level. This also prevents unnecessary escalation of issues:

"One thing that happened, that opened my eyes was that participants had an argument with each other without me even knowing it. And our supervisor who attended the ABCD training and the basic counselling training, she stepped in and solved the problem very nicely. She said that from these trainings, she had learnt how to work with conflict...how to communicate with people, and he could solve the problem herself and report this to me.....That's where the trainings comes in, we learn about emotional intelligence and how to work in a group."

Matthylise is studying towards an Education degree. She has used SEF as a stepping stone to pay off her student loan, and next year she plans to continue her studies to become a Foundational Phase Teacher at UNISA. She deeply appreciated not just the work and training opportunity but also the approachability of Willie's leadership, flexibility

and support. Last year, the Trust enabled her to do her practical (for her studies) at the Primary School and be based from there, which will hold her in good stead when she continues with her studies next year:

"Willie is very incredible. He understands every situation, and even when there's a problem - he will find the best solution for that problem. And he would not say no to develop you...I see him as a father figure, because every father wants the best for his children. That's what I see in him."
(Matthylise)



SEF Recommendations

There are three key recommendations arising from the SEF evaluation that emphasise agency, pivoting and activation – adding support to its strengths based orientation:

- **AGENCY** - Being aware of the power of agency and enabling opportunities for participants to make choices and exercise their sense of agency. The ability to provide psycho-social therapeutic services is evident and is an area worth exploring.
- **PIVOTING** - An awareness and understanding of pivoting as an acquired skill to develop by the SEF team and to be intentional about creating learning opportunities for it to be acquired and developed in the participants whilst they are part of the program which addresses all the stumbling blocks that exist.
- **ACTIVATION** - Provide opportunities for the community developers/activators identified who will receive training to facilitate in different contexts using an ABCD approach, to facilitate ABCD workshops immediately after they have received training so as to implement skills acquired and practice as much as possible.

The Co-op Trust has applied for a next SEF phase to grow the programme and strengthen its consortium. Like the butterfly, there are also new initiatives and relationships inspired through its planned expansion into the Southern Cape.

"The adult butterfly emerges from the chrysalis with its soft wings folded about its body. After a rest period, the butterfly begins to fly. Having gone through a metamorphosis, it will soon produce eggs - beginning the life cycle once again."

Reflections

The Co-op Community Trust is in it for the long haul and understands that investment in the foundational aspects of community work in the short term will yield best results over time. This story resonates with the other case studies in reinforcing the power of servant leadership and unlocking the gifts, talents, strengths and assets in communities. It also highlights the compounded value and quantum effects of nurturing a vibrant network that shares 'one mind' – building on gains made in the past (through Kouga Together) and building on them - rather than diluting and weakening existing structures through competition. The power of shared principles and values is also mirrored as a golden thread in all the layers presented in this story – the Co-

op, Community Trust and its growing network of partners. Uniquely, we see here how so much can be achieved by a few people who have a simple approach to life, a philosophy that Willie infuses daily by example. The goal here is not to establish a massive organisation with a 'global footprint', but to simply and gently move through the day's tasks, knowing that with good intention, focus and trust – good things come.


"I can truly say that I don't have a desire to reach 'globally'. What happens is that you do (what you can), the best way you can and then doors open up and you just follow that door... Whatever we do every day - how little it seems or how small it seems - you must do that to be able to handle more." (Willie)




Questions

- What role can Corporate Social Investment (CSI) play in stimulating and supporting asset based and citizen-led development?
- How can a strengths based approach cultivate a positive and regenerative corporate culture?
- How best can organisations establish an enabling environment to unlock assets and agency collectively when working in the same region?
- How can short term projects like SEF galvanise communities and provide stepping stones for sustainable social and economic development without losing traction when funding cycles end?
- How can leaders encourage power sharing and distribution ensuring accountable and ethical practices?









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Partnership formed to assist unemployed


by [Rayeen Roodjies](#) in [News](#) on 27 February 2025

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The Jeffreys Bay Dorp van Dorpe, a local organisation dedicated to creating and beautifying the town, has joined forces with the Co-ops Community Trust to transform the nursery and vegetable garden along Felix Street in Humansdorp, to assist with employment and share surplus produce with local soup kitchens.



From left are Piersa Schemm, Lethrone Soobis and Andile Ngwenya (supervisor).



Common Threads

Servant Leadership

*"Everything rises and falls upon leadership"
(James Maxwell)*

"He talks things through - I remember him once saying, if there's an issue - give someone a toffee and say: let's chew this toffee together and then we'll figure it out. So he's got that way about him that just wants you to explore, how can we do this in a way that's going to serve everyone concerned? He really has a genuineness about him...It's organic - the way he works and it's relational - his heart's in it and where his heart is, the work flows." (Michelle)

In all stories presented here, leaders are pioneering protagonists of change. As leaders, they therefore must learn to manage resistance to change both internally (within their organisations) and throughout their social networks.

Cultivating Coherence

The Co-op's efforts to influence its networks and popularise a strengths based approach amongst leadership structures has cultivated a shared

developmental paradigm and practice. This makes so much sense - influencing all levels of the system at the same time, rather than having competing and even contradictory paradigms at play in the same locality:

"I think it's easy - it is easy to sell something that's sellable, and that's basically what it is. People want to be part of a good story, and this is what we are sharing. And what I'm doing is, at every meeting where I am, is just promoting basic the thinking ... investing into people and land... it's not that difficult to bring that change - just telling good stories and get(ting) people in that mindset - telling them what is working and what is not working because it's it is so logical. It is not difficult to convince people that, that asset based development is actually working...We invest in children. We invest in youth. We invest in people, in health, and that's a good story. ..I don't think we can say we had this total success or this mass success, because we focus on the good stories. But, definitely, I think through a lot of effort ... the cohort NPO network, Bernie's workshops. That brought about the change. And then, some of us are sitting on those Boards, and we influenced those Board of Directors..." (Willie)

Developing Organically from Inside Out

"The wings of transformation are born of patience and struggle." — Janet Dickens

Having a shared optimistic paradigm cutting across this social network is also a huge asset. Where there are conflicting paradigms and ego positioning it is easy to have tensions which disrupt flow of projects and processes. The groundwork done by Willie and Ikhala Trust in ABCD promotion through public speaking, training, writing, mentoring and criteria setting has been instrumental in solidifying the foundational philosophy for this partnership.

Development is relational, not a project

All leaders engaged in this project, are down to earth, extremely approachable and authentic. Although they occupy powerful positions and are influencers, once you enter into conversation with all of them, you feel a deep familial sense, that you are talking to a friend or family member. We have learnt here that development is relational, not about projects and programmes. Hence, shifting

power is not necessarily about big campaigns and strategies, but is more about people who have power, being willing to share it. In fact, all leaders interviewed here do not seem to like social status and deliberately tear down any intimidation or power divisions that they could potentially separate them from 'the other' – using humour, appreciative language and often 'leading from the back.'

Relationships are valued as the greatest asset as it is within this social field that transformation takes place. Willie appreciates and values each human being. But also takes time to pause, think deeply when there might be disparate views, and seek common ground for a 'win-win' outcome. This also connects with the Ikhala Trust's ABCD advocacy work.

"I'm not an academic, I don't speak like academic using (big) words – I just say it like it is." (Willie)

Demystifying ABCD

What really is ABCD? is ABCD a paradigm or type of consciousness? is it a process? a development method? a philosophy? or a way of life? is it just for community development practitioners and stakeholders, who work with socially or

economically depressed communities ('the poor')? or is it a way of encouraging all citizens to take responsibility for themselves and others?

We cannot offer a single definition here - ABCD possibly embraces all of these. What everyone did seem to agree on is that this approach is about having an appreciative lens in work and life, it is about seeing the glass half full rather than half empty, it is to value other human beings, as well as the planet that sustains us.

When applied to the Development Field, where diverse individuals and entities intersect, there is great potential to bring all these elements together. Whether for programmes and projects, to redress imbalances and injustices, or cultivate knowledge and skills, development seems to make most sense when the people directly affected are valued and heard. People are the drivers of change, and it is logical that self organisation is most sustainable. Importantly, when people invest in their own development, relationships with others can be more balanced and equitable. It is co-investors who co-create.

ABCD is not necessarily the best word for what we are talking about – acronyms and jargons never are. But whatever terminology we choose to apply, we are talking about an alternative to

the conventional problem-based methodologies which have come to dominate. In spite of the many good intentions underpinning them, such problem-based approaches have labelled people as 'poor', 'deficient' and 'needy'. This has consequences for the people who are labelled and for those who perpetuate this type of language. It undermines our worthiness and creates dependency on 'experts' who bring solutions. These are often faulty and self-serving, and there have been far too many failures and wasted investments in the name of development for this culture to continue.

ABCD places responsibility where it should lie. It seems to be a more positive and impactful way for us to engage - not just with each other but also with ourselves. ABCD is also dignifying and reminds us of our common humanity – as fellow citizens finding our way.

Inter-generational Healing

Facilitating an ABCD process is not easy though, especially in depressed communities where there is inter-generational poverty. This has been evident in the SEF roll-out where it can be difficult for some learning partners, especially those isolated on farms to even realise that they might be an asset or have any assets to build on:

Shift the Paradigm to

#shiftthepower

*"Although the butterfly and the caterpillar are completely different, they are one and the same."
— Kendrick Lamar*

"How do we restore the dignity, the wisdom of our people to take charge of their destiny?...We must first prepare the ground to shift the power. In Paolo Freire's terms, people must be able to read their own world without anybody standing beside them and interpreting it for them.... When I look at the magnitude of the damage, I sometimes wake up with a pessimistic attitude but that is not going to help us, we must do something about it." (Rev Vika)

The stories presented in this publication weave different perspectives of leadership, power and impact in the context of strengths based development work. The project recognises the need for transformed attitudes, behaviour and relationships to regenerate society. However, it challenges the focus on power as the medium of change in the #shiftthepower movement, by rather

suggesting that a shift in paradigm is a precondition and a catalyst to shifting power and institutional dynamics across the development sector.

Ikhala firmly believes that a culture of domination, division and, most importantly, a dominant problem or needs based paradigm has led us astray, as a country and people:

"If the donor will shift the power and just give money to the people – what will people do with the money? Are they not going to do the same thing, corruption and 'eat that money' and that's it. Let's build human beings and once we have done that, then we can talk about how we move forward." (Rev Vika)



Conclusion

In telling these three stories, we have shared a small glimpse of citizen led organisations and the inspirational leaders behind them – three pioneering leaders rooted in their communities, all holding a firm belief in the power of shared humanity. Our gaze has turned away from the nuggets underfoot to become locked in multi-national and service agreements. People latch onto roles of donor, grantee, service provider & beneficiary, and the human connection is often lost in a chain of co-dependency. These are valued Ikhala's learning partners where they meet as equals - an authentic relationship that is rare to see.

"I think 95% of South Africans tonight just want to go home and be with their family .. It's that 5% that's ruling and reigning with terror. The thing is to get the 95% to start to talk and start to take action...There is a long way for us (to go), but we can do it in our small little groups everywhere."
(Willie)



In conclusion, the greatest lesson that we put forward here, is that it is ordinary citizens and inspirational leaders who catalyse quantum change, especially when they live and work with this simple philosophy: "Do what you can, where you are, with what you have."

*"Nature's message was always there and for us to see. It was written on the wings of butterflies."—
Kjell B. Sandved*





USE YOUR
VOICE FOR
KINDNESS
YOUR EARS FOR
COMPASSION,
YOUR HANDS FOR
CHARITY,
YOUR MIND FOR
TRUTH and
your heart for
LOVE



Afterword

Bernie Dolley, Director

"Butterflies rest when it rains because it damages their wings. It's ok to rest during the storms of life. You will fly again when it's over"

After an incredible 23 year journey, the time has come to officially bring our chapter as Ikhala Trust to a close. But rather than marking and end, we're choosing to celebrate that this has truly been – a bold beautiful beginning.

What started as a spark of an idea became a powerful force for community- driven development. Together we built something that mattered. We reached people, shifted narratives and create space where passion, courage and collaboration thrived. We were true to our development principles collectively crafted in 2001: we did not what we set out to do: we made a difference.

Starting this organisation as its co-ordinator (I never wanted to be called a Director – I felt that it sounded far too fancy especially as I at the time was the sole employee) to eventually accepting that I could actually be a Director was quite a shift for me personally. The title didn't matter it was more about the passion behind the purpose that was important.

Writing the case studies of the 3 leaders i.e. Teresa, Gcobani and Willie is not just a record of events – it is a tribute to the heartbeats behind the headlines. The mentors who guided us, the partners who believed in our mission, the community members who trusted us and especially our committed Trustees over the years who showed up again and again with courage and care.

Relevant, credible and reputable NGOs need a solid governance structure to steer the ship and I have been privileged to have some of the best who served Ikhala Trust faithfully over the 23 years. I salute you and always said that had it not been that I had your unwavering support and yes sometimes a clash of ideas, I would not have grown in my role as a leader in the way I have. I commit to supporting emerging, younger leaders in the way that you supported me.

We have been steadfast over more than a decade in advocating, promoting and facilitating strengths-based development approaches and remained unapologetic about this approach. Today it is heart-warming to see so many individuals and communities who have leaned

into a strengths-based approach and created new pathways in the different communities where they work or live.

I have been privileged to travel internationally to more than 12 countries representing Ikhala Trust at Conferences, Seminars and participating in Asset Based Community Development Workshops and Conferences. My fondest memories have to be my visits to Goa, India where I attended two international conferences. I had always wanted to go to India and it will always hold a special place in my heart. I learnt so much from so many people and humbled by the courage and resilience of women in particular. I plan to go back there again one day. There are so many people to thank – people who shaped my thinking and enriched my development and personal life in so many ways however I want to firstly make special mention of Gord Cunningham, Brianne Peters and Alison Mathie who worked at the Coady International Institute, Nova Scotia, Canada. Ikhala Trust is grateful for the partnership and friendship over the years and that we were finally able to 'name' what it was we were doing. You helped us to be recognised on the global stage and for that we will always be grateful.

A very special and heartfelt thank you and appreciation to my dear colleague and friend, Ninnette Eliasov who has journeyed with Ikhala Trust for more than 20 years. Our paths crossed at just the right time and with Nin's brilliant knack for pulling workshop manuals and all kinds of other things together we were able to develop an ABCD Toolkit, documentary and many other publications that were specific to our South African context around ABCD. I could not have done any of this without you and will always be indebted to you. You burnt the mid-night oil on so many occasions going beyond the scope of duty and days allocated in order to get the work done. There are not many people like you!!

To Unathi and Vuyokazi thank you for the contribution you made at Ikhala Trust and the manner in which you executed your activities and the relationship you had with our community partners.

In conclusion, nothing could be more devastating than the loss of a loved one, especially your soul mate and best friend, as happened to me on the 30 th June 2021 when my husband passed away after contracting the COVID-19 virus. My saving

grace and my reason to keep moving forward was the fact that I was able to facilitate many ABCD workshops and got to visit and stay in places that I never thought I would. Just seeing the transformation in the room after a few days together made the grieving journey so much more manageable – not that there were never moments when it all came crashing down, but being surrounded by amazing people and friends I could lean into certainly helped.

While the organisation may be concluding its formal operations - its impact, its spirit and its community live on – in each of you and in the ripple effect of what we have created. Do we really need to be institutionalised and structured to make a difference – even if just a small difference? I argue not.



Tributes Page

"Many of the apple trees grown in North America can be traced to one pioneering nurseryman who was nicknamed 'Johnny Appleseed'. In my humble opinion Bernie, you are the Johnny Appleseed of ABCD in South Africa! For more than two decades you have given it your all. It is now up to others to take over the ABCD seed nursery. Go well into the next chapter." Gord Cunningham (former Executive Director, Coady International Institute)

Thank you Ikhala Trust for the wonderful work done. You gave us a name for the organic way we developed ourselves in our communities using what we have where we are. Your legacy will remain. We will miss you and the calls to fetch material and other goodies for the community initiatives. The many training sessions and talks and messages will bear fruit long after. You sowed the seed. It's time for us to grow and prosper. May God bless you all... You contributed to my personal development and mindshifts. I'm a better person because of Ikhala Trust and ABCD. Chris Engelbrecht (Program Manager, Department of Social Development)

Thank you for your support and contribution to the community based organisations in Eastern Cape. Thank you for investing time, money and energy implementing ABCD methodology in South Africa and abroad. Vuyo Msizi (Social Change Assistance Trust)

"Your journey has come to this point but let's see it as a fork in the road....we will continue sharing the #abcd message in other ways! Onwards and upwards! Janine Ward (Africa ABCD Institute)

Thank you Ikhala Trust for inspiring so many of us with sustainability mindsets including communities as partners. Your impact is wider than what statistics could capture. You've changed hearts that led to hands & feet wanting to follow in your footsteps. We salute you for doing the pioneering work. Anna-Louise Olivier (former Director, Uviwe Child and Youth Services)

My deep and heartfelt gratitude to the visionary Board, the devoted team, the broader communities Ikhala Trust worked and walked alongside to build, transform and inspire generations to come...thank you for leading with unwavering commitment, prophetic insight and an undying belief in people power, for establishing a movement, globally renowned and respected, a space of courage, dignity and agency, for communities often overlooked. May the spirit of Ikhala Trust live on in every act of local agency, every policy shift it influenced, every emerging leader it empowered and every community it helped to reimagine its future. With respect, love and enduring solidarity. Titania Stefanus-Zincke (Chief Operating Officer – Mainstream Renewable Power South Africa)

"I would still want to remember Ikhala Trust in the most heartwarming way possible. The principles Ikhala instilled on how I carve holistic development in communities, could never be erased or pronounced 'outdated'...It is not goodbye...it can never be. (Yolisa Yavela Lawrence, SGS Consulting)

"You truly have made a huge impact in thousands of people's lives. We thank you for your service in helping the Eastern Cape to empower people to be more self-sustaining. And also for assisting us at the Port Alfred Soup Kitchen. God bless you all. (Craig Ellis)

"Ikhala has opened a huge door of hope to me personally and without Ikhala I doubt I would have had the strength and backing to pursue the huge changes the Missionvale Care Centre has gone through in the past few years. I needed an ally and found it in Ikhala and its network to push for change towards a more developmental approach." (Sabrina Lambers, General Manager, Missionvale Care Centre)

"We started reminiscing about our long engagement with Ikhala — and what a force of nature you are! You really helped put ABCD on the map in Africa...Thank you, thank you for everything you've done." (David Martin, Comart Foundation)



