

Beyond the development impasse: the role of local economic development and community self- reliance in rural South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The failure of successive generations of imported, Western development strategies and projects to deliver meaningful reductions in poverty and achieve basic needs in Africa, has provoked a deep questioning of Western concepts and methodologies of development. Non-governmental organisations and development practitioners are increasingly focusing their attention on strategies which build upon local knowledge, skills and resources. The concepts of 'self-reliance' and local economic development are examined in the context of development challenges which face Africa. This is followed by a detailed case study of local economic development in the rural Mpofu District of the former Ciskei Homeland, which was incorporated into the Eastern Cape province of South Africa with the demise of apartheid in 1994.

INTRODUCTION

The general failure of the grand development narratives of the post-World War II era, the theoretical vacuum left as a result of the collapse of state socialism in the 1980s, and the dubious results of structural adjustment, have together created an impasse in development thinking in the 1990s. Although there appears to be no single grand narrative which can realistically offer an all-embracing alternative in the same sense that some of the earlier theories did, an opportunity for more situationally relevant and people-centred development is apparent and

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seems highly appropriate. Local development initiatives may be seen as a partial response, which is steadily gaining in prominence, possibly because of the support which free-market ideology accords to the notion of independent economic action, and the basic reality that poverty, particularly in the South, encourages individuals and communities to take charge of their own destiny.

Vain Western notions of the 'global village' ignore the inability of the majority of the world's population to participate adequately in such post-modern concepts, for as Esteva and Prakash (1997:285) assert, 'far from being "globalized", the real lives of most people on Earth are clearly *marginalised* from any "global" way of life. The social majorities of the world will never, now or in the future, have access to these so-called global phenomena.' Instead, notions such as 'self-reliance' and local equivalents of 'Local Economic Development' (LED) appear to be among the few realistic development options available to the 'poorest of the poor', who seem to have been all but abandoned by the Western-dominated global economy. Evidence from rural Africa indicates that, as part of the process of surviving, inhabitants of the world's poorest continent are becoming more reliant on indigenous technical knowledge, production systems and livelihoods, and the emergence of non-Western forms of LED. Thus far, in development literature, LED has been defined and interpreted in terms of Western economic concepts (Blakely 1994). In poorer countries, however, it can be argued that LED takes on a much more basic form, due to limited technology, resources and external support. This reality leads to the suggestion that LED in the South needs to be recognised and understood as a survivalist strategy, which is often referred to as 'self-reliance' in the literature (Gooneratne & Mbilinyi 1992). Even though LED in the South generally lacks the 'big business', investment and infrastructure characteristics of its counterparts in the North (Ferguson 1992), there are actually many similarities in terms of the nature of local control and reliance on local skills and initiative. This article considers some of the development challenges which face Africa, and the nature of the dilemma which exists, and presents a detailed case-study of LED in the rural Mpofu District of the former Ciskei Homeland, which was incorporated into the Eastern Cape province of South Africa in 1994.

AFRICAN REALITIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

Desperate economic realities in Africa compel many communities to seek their own solutions to the circumstances in which they find themselves. According to the United Nations, '(for) approximately one-sixth of mankind, the march of human progress has become a retreat. In many nations, development is being thrown into reverse. And after decades of steady economic advance, large areas of the world are being thrown back into poverty' (Gooneratne & Mbilinyi 1992:22). The effective collapse of social services and infrastructure in many parts of Africa, coupled with hyperinflation, vast debt burdens and the disastrous effects of global trade and structural adjustment packages, militate against any significant intervention by national governments. Aside from what are often, in aggregate terms, somewhat limited interventions by aid agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many communities have been forced to look inward at their own resources and skills, in order to carve a viable future for themselves and their children.

The failure of successive generations of imported, Western development strategies and projects to deliver meaningful reductions in poverty and achieve basic needs in Africa, has provoked a deep questioning of Western concepts and methodologies of development. According to Sachs (1997:290), 'After forty years of development, the state of affairs is dismal. The gap between frontrunners and stragglers has not been bridged; on the contrary, it has widened to the extent that it has become unimaginable that it could ever be closed.' The result has been a focusing of attention among practitioners and NGOs on strategies which build upon local knowledge, skills and resources. Such strategies focus more on culturally unique aspirations and objectives, rather than striving to impose an inflexible, alien set of ideologies and goals (Gooneratne & Mbilinyi 1992; Burkey 1993).

This change in development focus has emerged as a result of the perceived 'impasse in development theory' (Schuurman 1993), which has been reached as a result of a number of factors, such as the widening gap between rich and poor, a short- rather than long-term policy focus in many developing countries, a series of economic and environmental catastrophes, and the delegitimisation of socialism. Furthermore, it has been recognised that global theories, and an obsession with world rather than national markets, have failed to reduce poverty and inequality, whilst 'post-modern' arguments have

simultaneously sought to undermine the 'great narratives' of the past (Schuurman 1993; Crush 1995).

Observed changes in community-based development over the last twenty years are belatedly being acknowledged and incorporated into theoretical constructs. The early, and perhaps somewhat limited, principles of 'development from below' and 'development from within' are being drawn together with empirical evidence into a more sustained framework by the recent emergence of the 'anti-development' paradigm (Stock 1995). It seems that anti-development discourses originate in the current crisis of development and from the work of grassroots groups. Escobar (1995:226) argues that there is potential 'for more radical transformations of the modern capitalist order and the search for alternate ways of organising societies and economies, of satisfying needs, of healing and living'.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE IN AFRICA

It is suggested here that the concrete expression of the theoretical standpoints detailed above is to be found in the applied strategies of 'self-reliance' and Local Economic Development. The commonly used concept of 'self-reliance' (Gooneratne & Mbilinyi 1992) would, in many ways, appear to be the situationally specific equivalent of what is often termed Local Economic Development (LED) in the Western world. The importance of local control and empowerment, together with a reliance on local initiative and resourcefulness to improve conditions, feature in both concepts. It seems appropriate that the concept of LED should be used generically to characterise a broad category of locally based and controlled development and self-reliance initiatives in Africa, which differ from their Western counterparts, in terms of project focus, scale and funding.

LED can be defined as

the process in which local governments or community-based organisations engage to stimulate or maintain business activity and/or employment. The principal goal of LED is to stimulate local employment opportunities in sectors that improve the community, using existing human, natural, and institutional resources. (Blakely 1994:xvi)

LED can materialise when local people seize the initiative and engage in actions which unify communities, business and other relevant authorities in their local area in a joint endeavour to improve their

economic and social conditions (Stöhr 1990). It appears that LED is generally a cost-effective and community-empowering process, which has a defined role to play and can yield tangible benefits for participating communities. Although LED in the South and the North is directly comparable, in terms of issues such as reliance on local control and initiative and the addressing of local needs, the well-publicised Northern examples tend to focus far more on issues of investment, big-business support and large project development undertaken by relatively well-resourced local agencies (Judd & Parkinson 1990). In the South, however, as the literature on 'self-reliance' suggests, LED relies far more on community-based initiatives, utilising indigenous skills and seeking primarily to ensure survival, rather than participation in the global economy (Taylor & Mackenzie 1992).

In a world where post-modern thinking encourages a rejection of all-encompassing models and a greater focus on local uniqueness, LED is clearly an expression of a broader paradigm shift in both the social sciences and global reality. In addition, there seem to be close parallels between the fundamental principles of LED and the ideas advocated by anti-development theorists, namely that future development initiatives should focus on strengthening local social movements, rather than encouraging alien or imposed Western development theories. For example, Escobar (1995:215) asserts that anti-development theorists, 'speak of "alternatives to development", that is, a rejection of the entire paradigm. They see this reformulation as a historical possibility already underway in innovative grassroots movements and experiments.' Whilst it seems inappropriate to argue for the total abandonment of external involvement in the development process, there are instances where LED might provide an alternative form of development in Africa.

Much has been written recently on the various Southern equivalents of LED, for example, the significance of local coping strategies, the informal sector and self-reliance, which are recognised as being important elements in the survival strategies of many communities (Taylor & Mackenzie 1992; Binns 1995). Stock (1995) argues that development strategies in Africa need to focus more on local self-help and community self-reliance. Structural adjustment, drought, war, civil strife and the failure of 'top-down' development schemes have forced many rural Africans to look inward at their own resources and skills to cope with the harsh realities of the modern global economy. Whilst indigenous technical knowledge has always been important in

African communities, the significance of its role in future development strategies has only really received wide recognition in recent years (Binns 1994). The existence of impressive repertoires of local knowledge and the capacity for innovation among African rural producers was recognised in the early 1960s by writers such as Polly Hill (1963) and Ester Boserup (1965, 1993). In the mid-1980s, Richards (1985, 1986) showed that West African farming systems and practices are by no means static and irrational, as many colonial observers surmised, and that in the context of existing technical and environmental constraints many producers' decisions are actually perfectly rational. The management of the environment by indigenous Africans is another theme which has received useful attention recently. For example, Tiffen, Mortimore and Gichuki (1994), in their study of Machakos District, Kenya, trace the relationship between population growth and land use. Far from a scene of land degradation and food shortages, the Machakos study reveals increasing productivity and careful environmental management, with communities demonstrating a good awareness of the importance of sustainability.

What is significant is the degree to which the self-reliance or LED perspective appears to be asserting itself (Taylor & Mackenzie 1992), and in fact the United Nations has endorsed such actions as a logical way forward for marginal communities (Gooneratne & Mbiliyni 1992). Gooneratne and Mbiliyni (1992:261) observe, 'In many situations, local initiatives constitute the only means of survival for the poor and disadvantaged'; thus local control of resources and initiatives is critical. The question of self-reliance has been further examined by Taylor and Mackenzie (1992), building on Stöhr's earlier (1981) 'development from below' thesis. They advocate the concept of 'development from within' in the case of Africa, focusing on enhanced participation and control by local people over their development endeavours in a manner which embraces all members of a community. The focus on people and their local knowledge in the implementation of development has clear advantages. However, as Stock (1995:363) points out, the notion is constrained by the complexity and unpredictability of individual communities and strategies, and the fact that communities are not isolated and autonomous. Stock suggests that this approach cannot be regarded as a panacea, and that it is 'unlikely to achieve more than small sporadic victories for the disadvantaged majority'.

Whilst the principles of self-reliance are admirable, the inherent reality, identified many years ago by writers on dependency, is that it

is impossible to distance oneself entirely from the world capitalist economy (Brookfield 1975). For some poor communities, linking directly or indirectly to a national and international economic system has often been disastrous, with cheap imports destroying the local retail and production base (Potter *et al.* 1999). This reality, coupled with runaway inflation rates, has caused many poor individuals and communities to fall partially outside the so-called 'modern' economy, forcing them to rely more on their local skills and resources (Taylor & Mackenzie 1992). As evidence from South Africa will illustrate, the break from the capitalist system cannot realistically be achieved, and survival depends on the ability to apply self-reliance strategies which seek to participate at the lowest tiers of the capitalist system. In this scenario, the future for participants is often precarious, and success depends on the ability to be co-opted or excluded by the market.

THE REALITIES OF POVERTY IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA: SETTING THE SCENE FOR DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The notion of communities seizing the development initiative has been recorded in various studies undertaken recently in South Africa (Nel 1994; National Business Initiative 1995). The concept of LED is now receiving considerable attention from government, NGOs and academics alike (Republic of South Africa [RSA] 1995a; Rogerson 1994, 1995; Tomlinson 1993, 1994; Nel 1994), and appears to be an appropriate strategy which is democratically managed and sensitive to local needs, resources and aspirations.

Given the relative strength of the economy, and the quality of infrastructure, resources and human capital, South Africa has not experienced levels of economic debilitation to the same degree as many other African countries. However, such a broad statement masks the reality that South Africa remains a highly unequal society as a result of its apartheid legacy (Binns 1998; Fine & Rustonjee 1996; Lester 1996; Petersson 1997). Decades of enforced spatial, social and economic segregation on the grounds of race have left a complex political and legislative situation which is only gradually becoming disentangled.

There is little doubt that the poorest members of South Africa's population are rural dwellers. It needs to be appreciated that until recently two rural realities existed, as a result of the enforced division of rural space on the grounds of race, and for many this situation still persists. Whilst the majority of rural South Africa was, and still is, held

under white control, in the former black reserves or Homelands, the majority of the population only had access to 13 per cent of the country's land surface. In the post-apartheid era these former Homeland areas are still characterised by severe poverty, disempowerment, dependency and outmigration of skilled and educated people. Under apartheid, black people were forcibly removed from 'white areas' to the Homelands, in numbers which frequently exceeded their carrying capacity (Fox & Nel 1997). As a result of this, and further exacerbated by the inherent poor quality of land, most such rural areas are severely degraded, and research indicates that the primary sources of rural income are in fact from urban areas, in the shape of migrant remittances and state old-age pensions. In many former Homeland rural areas, fewer than 1 per cent of Africans can be classified as full-time commercial farmers (Bembridge 1987), and in some parts of Eastern Cape province only 10 per cent of income is not derived from urban sources (de Wet 1993). In certain districts, up to 75 per cent of the able-bodied men are migrants working outside the district on a semi-permanent basis. Decades of the apartheid government's discrimination and manipulation have forced South Africa's black population into a situation of dependence on white-controlled capitalism, and have entrenched their position as a servile proletariat (Fine & Rustonjee 1996; Lester 1996; Petersson 1997). In such a situation, the need for innovative rural development strategies and the enhancement of local self-reliance has become absolutely critical in the post-apartheid period.

South Africa's peaceful revolution of the early 1990s and the first democratic election in 1994 have heralded significant changes for the country and its citizens. In terms of rural policy, however, the new government's resource and capacity constraints have hindered the implementation of effective change. Despite the drafting of the key Reconstruction and Development Programme (ANC 1994) as a national development strategy, and the associated Rural Development Strategy, with its implicit support for Local Economic Development (RSA 1995b), there has, to date, been little tangible economic and employment progress in rural areas in the former Homelands.

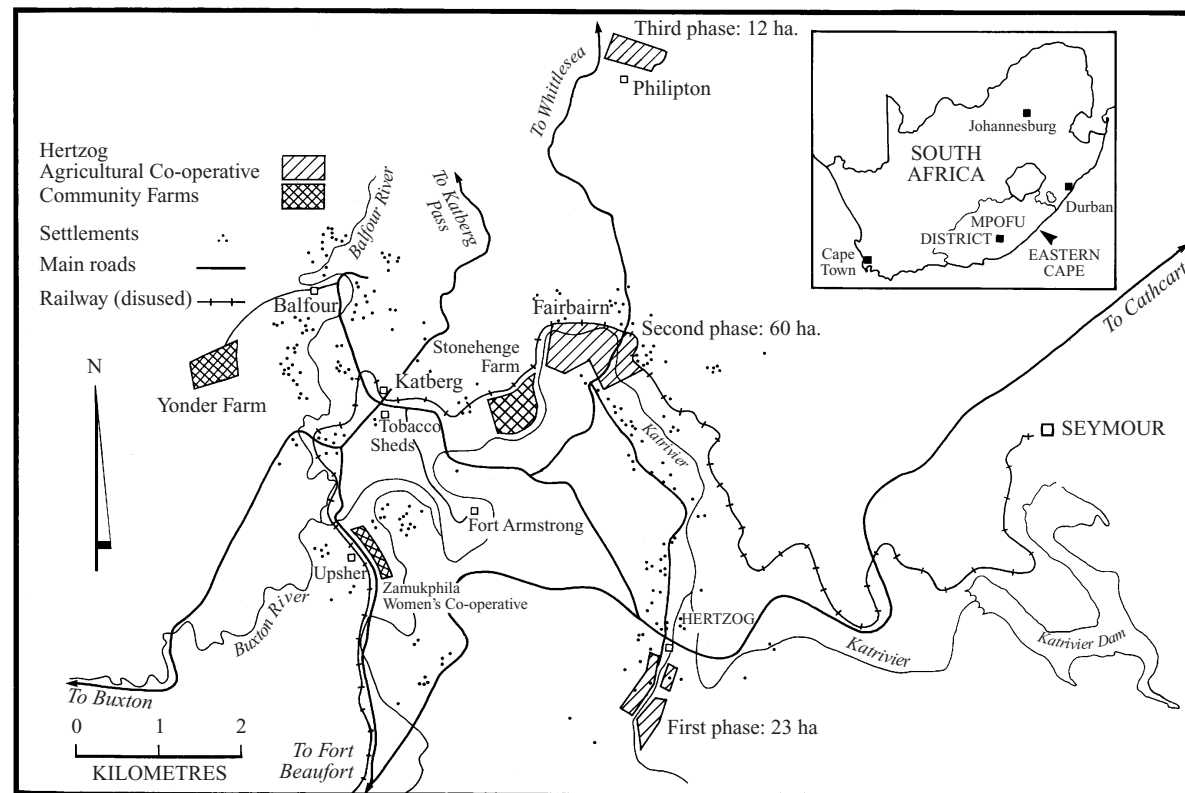
Although South Africa now has a majority black government, the economy remains firmly controlled by large, essentially white, business interests. In the rural sector, the buying power and collective bargaining of established agri-business and cooperatives of large, white farmers, together with the legacy of fixed sourcing and supply agreements, makes it difficult for newcomers to penetrate and compete

effectively in the established market (ANC 1994; RSA 1995b). This is particularly acute for black rural communities, living in spatially isolated areas, with poor support, physical resources and infrastructure, and having to compete with established agri-business. The lack of machinery, skills, capital, buying power and essential networks further restricts opportunities. The currently weak nature of rural local government, which lacks adequate resources to tackle all the challenges faced in the areas under their jurisdiction, does not help the situation. Although there have been cases of Black farmers receiving state assistance, either individually or collectively, to acquire former white-owned land in more favourable areas, their relative lack of experience and capital are often major obstacles (Bokavu, pers. com. 1997). In the light of these constraints, it is indeed significant when Homeland communities are able to launch and sustain a process of LED independently, with little or no external support. We will now examine recent developments in the Mpofu District of the former Ciskei Homeland in South Africa's Eastern Cape province.

THE STUDY AREA

Mpofu District in the former Ciskei Homeland (Map 1), has a population of approximately 9100 people (Development Bank of Southern Africa [DBSA] 1991). As in many districts in the Eastern Cape, poverty levels are high: unemployment stands at 42 per cent and male absenteeism is 24 per cent, reflecting the absence of local employment opportunities (Binns 1998; DBSA 1991). The District lies in the foothills of the Katberg mountains and in the upper-catchment region of the Kat River, where rainfall is relatively high (approximately 600 mm per annum). The river provides a reasonably reliable water supply throughout the year, and the valley soils are generally fertile (Department of Water Affairs 1986).

The District was settled in the nineteenth century by white and 'coloured' (i.e. people of 'mixed race') farmers, who practised a combination of intensive, irrigated farming in the Kat River valley and extensive grazing of livestock on the surrounding plains and hills. The area gained a reputation for being one of the primary tobacco and citrus producing regions in the country (Logie 1997). In the late 1970s, however, the land was expropriated, leading to out-migration of white farmers and the enforced removal of the majority of the 'coloured' population to other areas of the Eastern Cape. Mpofu District was



Map 1 Local economic development projects in the Mpofu District.
 Source: Cartographical Unit, Rhodes University.

transferred to the 'independent' Ciskei Homeland in 1984 (Logie 1997) and thereafter, with the exception of a few state farms, all production ceased, and the Kat River valley was referred to as, 'the East Cape valley that died' (Hartle 1990:8).

Although white and 'coloured' farm-owners left the area following expropriation, their black and 'coloured' workers remained on the land with their families. Although these workers lived in the valley, in the absence of any clear government policy, they were denied access to the land for farming. Ownership of the land was largely vested in the state, which failed to utilise it to the benefit of the local community (Hartle 1990). By 1990, it was noted that, 'the citrus trees have died, as has the lucerne. No one has bothered to irrigate the fields, which now lie fallow' (Hartle 1990:9). In the late 1980s there was an unsuccessful attempt by the Ciskei Department of Agriculture to reestablish large-scale tobacco farming in the valley. For a brief period during the early 1990s, a private agricultural concern, encouraged by the Ciskeian regime, farmed tobacco and potatoes in the area. Both schemes failed to involve the local community fully, a feature which probably contributed to their demise (Meyer, pers. com. 1995). Consequently, by late 1993, most of the land in the valley had not been farmed for almost thirteen years. This resulted in the almost total absence of local employment opportunities, which aggravated poverty levels and encouraged male out-migration in search of work. Despite this negative picture, the community possessed valuable assets, most notably the farming skills and experience accumulated by several hundred ex-farm workers, and also the presence of abandoned, but reusable, agricultural land and infrastructure. These positive aspects have provided a strong potential base for community-driven LED.

EMERGING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN MPOFU DISTRICT

The bleak picture described above began to change after 1994. Following the demise of apartheid, the first democratic elections, and the reincorporation of Ciskei into South Africa, local communities started to take up the challenge of development. Detailed field research in the District has identified the existence of three significant local development initiatives which were wholly established and are controlled by local communities. The near absence of external support, the limited ability of the rural local government to intervene, grinding poverty, and the desperate need to take action to promote survival and

generate employment opportunities, have together catalysed subsequent developments. The three initiatives (see Map 1) are:

1. The Philani ('making a living') Community Development Project, in the small rural service centre of Balfour, which has focused on food supply and tourism projects.
2. The women's Zamukphila ('trying to survive') Co-operative, established at Upsher village to supply vegetables to the local community.
3. The Hertzog Agricultural Co-operative (HACOP), involving over 100 local farmers in intensive irrigated agriculture and significantly improving the quality of life of the participants. HACOP has inspired neighbouring communities and encouraged the emergence of small industries in the area, such as fence-making and bucket-making.

Philani community development project

In December 1994, under the guidance of a charismatic primary school teacher, Mr Sandile Mkonto, a broad-based community development programme was discussed and is gradually being implemented in Balfour. The town had been a thriving service centre in a major tobacco producing area until the early 1980s, when state expropriation of farms led to the collapse of agro-industry and escalating unemployment. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the situation deteriorated, and many left the area in search of employment elsewhere. Mr Mkonto and others migrated to Cape Town, but maintained strong links with their home area. Whilst in Cape Town, Mkonto came into contact with overseas tourists, and began to appreciate the economic potential of the developing tourist industry. These experiences influenced subsequent project identification on his return to Balfour (Mkonto, pers. com. 1998).

In 1995, the 300 members of Philani elected a committee, and the project was registered as a non-profit-making company to oversee community development endeavours. The key priorities are skills training, vegetable production, bead-making and, more recently, tourism promotion. In the same year, a loan of R30,000 (approx \$US6,000) was secured from the Eastern Cape Development Agency, which was used to purchase seed potatoes and train community members in sewing, leather-work, fence-, candle- and bead-making. Initial results were not particularly impressive, since people lacked the

resources to establish their own businesses, and the local market remains impoverished. The potato-growing scheme foundered due to theft by what Mkonto described as 'starving people'. More successful initiatives include the export of beadwork from Balfour, with the assistance of the provincial Department of Education and Culture, and subsequent plans to establish a craft school in the area (Mkonto, pers. com. 1998).

A recent focus has been on the identified market niche of tourism promotion, in what is an historically rich area situated on the nineteenth-century frontier between colonial and tribal groups. The key historical feature is Fort Armstrong, which was an important defensive point during the Frontier Wars of the mid-nineteenth century (Logie 1997). The project committee approached the National Monuments Council and succeeded in obtaining a grant of R50,000 (approx \$US10,000) to restore the fort and its environs. Labour-intensive construction techniques were employed and twenty-four community members were trained to undertake the work. The goal is to use this facility as a local museum and tourist centre, which will hopefully stimulate the economy (*Eastern Province Herald* 1997). In mid-1998, negotiations were under way with the Eastern Cape Tourism Board to promote the area. In parallel, Philani is also investigating the rehabilitation of hiking trails in surrounding forests, and has been given a lease on a derelict tourist camp which it hopes to bring back into operation.

Other development plans include the possible restoration of the abandoned railway line to Fort Beaufort and Seymour, and the cultivation of vegetables on 'Yonder' farm, which the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture has recently leased to Philani. Although the project is still in its infancy, and relatively few jobs have yet been created, the initiative has succeeded in receiving a not insignificant degree of external support. Mkonto was keen to point out that in such a disempowered community the sense of hope and restoration of dignity which have been generated are also in themselves significant achievements (Mkonto, pers. com. 1998).

Zamukphila women's co-operative

In 1994, a group of thirteen women living in Upsher village close to Balfour came together to establish a community vegetable-growing project named Zamukphila, meaning 'trying to survive'. They were motivated by low levels of income and nutrition, particularly among

their children, and concern about their husbands' squandering of money on alcohol (Tantjie, pers. com. 1996). The women approached Ulimicor, the Ciskei State Agricultural Corporation, to seek advice and land. Ulimicor advised them to establish a cooperative and assisted them in drawing up a constitution. The women insisted that men should be excluded from membership of the cooperative, and in terms of the constitution men are only allowed to provide labour and have no immediate claim on the outputs (Ulimicor, pers. com. 1996). Ulimicor then allocated the women approximately 2 hectares of land adjacent to the village and provided irrigation water, whilst a local farmer, Mr Jonase, has occasionally assisted with the provision of fertilizer and seeds (Nxyeka, pers. com. 1997).

The women frankly admit that the project has experienced mixed fortunes, but none the less it has provided them with a valuable supplement to household food budgets. Crops grown include cabbage, carrots, beetroot, potatoes, onions and spinach, and intercropping is practised. In 1996, for the first time, the women managed to supplement household income from the sale of surplus produce. Although some difficulties have been experienced with ploughing and water supply, the women remain optimistic and have a sense of self-achievement from their endeavours (Nxyeka, pers. com. 1997; Tantjie, pers. com. 1998).

Hertzog Agricultural Co-operative

The most successful initiative in the area is the Hertzog Agricultural Co-operative (HACOP), which was established by dispossessed ex-farm-workers in 1994, and has been considered elsewhere in some detail (Nel & Hill 1996; Nel *et al.* 1997). Their endeavour was prompted by high levels of poverty and unemployment, and the realisation that they would need to seek their own solution to the crisis that they faced. A series of community workshops was held, leading to the recognition that the utilisation of abandoned farmland and irrigation infrastructure was the only viable option. This choice was influenced by the reality that most people in the District possessed farming skills, which had been learnt in the earlier productive phase of the valley up to the 1970s. Capable, resourceful and innovative members of the community were identified and democratically elected to lead the process and initiate development. The state granted HACOP access to the land for ten years, and a commercial loan was secured from the Ciskei Agricultural

Bank (Nel & Hill 1996). According to the chairperson of the cooperative, Mr Ebenezer Nkayi, the community realised that, 'they couldn't wait for the government because the people are hungry', and they needed to launch their own development strategy (Nkayi, pers. com. 1995).

A total of 100 hectares were returned to production in the Hertzog, Fairbairn and Philipton areas. Whilst this may seem a small number of plots, it appears that a large percentage of the families in this particular stretch of the river valley now have access to land, and therefore a means of generating income. It is significant that the cooperative started operations without any external grants. Initial capital came from private savings and three successive loans from the Ciskei Agricultural Bank. The reliance on market loans and the absence of grant dependence places the scheme in a unique category among rural black communities in South Africa (Nel *et al.* 1997). Unfortunately, although the initial loans were repaid, more recently high default rates have led to the suspension of loans. In a move which has partially addressed the capital shortfall, and in recognition of HACOP's achievements, a European donor organisation gave pumping and irrigation equipment to the cooperative in 1998 (Nkayi, pers. com. 1998).

HACOP jointly owns and administers ploughing and harvesting services, and maintains the irrigation pumps and piping. Intensive market-gardening produces cabbages, potatoes, tomatoes, spinach, carrots and pumpkins, whilst some fruit trees have been planted along the plot boundaries. A spirit of joint endeavour prevails in the cooperative, with community members helping each other in labour-intensive activities such as ploughing, seeding, spraying and harvesting (Nel & Hill 1996).

Although accurate statistics are difficult to obtain, indications of the level of success can be gauged from output on both an individual and a community basis. Single plot holders are able to produce up to 8,000 cabbages per growing season, whilst the community's surplus potato crop in the February–March season of 1996 came to 6,000 10-kilogramme bags. Produce is sold to traders who come to the area from urban centres up to 300 kilometres away. Unfortunately, the absence of a community-owned truck to transport surplus produce to distant markets reduces the potential profits accruing to the community, and enforces a continuing dependence on urban-based wholesalers (Nkayi, pers. com. 1996). In late 1998 there were tentative moves to secure a more permanent market for produce, with the help of an aid agency

sympathetic to the constraints faced by community farmers (Motteux, pers. com. 1998).

The scheme has undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on the community, and the economy of the valley has been transformed. Profits of up to R3,000 (approx. \$US600) per quarter hectare per growing season have been recorded. Although this may seem a small amount, for families which were often dependent on just a single state pension the earnings from crop production have increased available family income by up to a factor of five, which has significantly enhanced the quality of life. Observed improvements in the valley include the renovation of homes and purchases of clothing and furniture. Interviews with HACOP members also indicate that the attainment of a reliable source of income has improved levels of family nutrition and education (Site Survey 1996). The success of the venture has generated an observable sense of pride and self-reliance in the community and its work (Meyer, pers. com. 1995).

The scheme's success has inspired neighbouring communities also living on ex-white farmland, who wish to undertake similar projects and are looking to HACOP for guidance. In an effort to promote regional development, the cooperative is jointly planning an agricultural support centre and agri-business with the Development Forum in the nearby town of Seymour (see Map 1) (Kota, pers. com. 1995). Tangible spin-offs from the wealth creation which has occurred in the area, and the parallel requirements of HACOP, include the establishment of a small wire-fence-making enterprise in Hertzog, employing two people, and a small workshop employing four people making metal household goods such as buckets and other containers. In both cases the local generation of surplus capital from vegetable production has played a key role in fostering these developments (Site Survey 1997).

CONCLUSION: IDENTIFYING A WAY FORWARD?

The positive results which have been achieved have benefited the host communities directly, and profits have largely remained within the community. In adopting such self-reliant approaches, entrepreneurship, a sense of pride, self-fulfilment and achievement are evident among community members. The development process clearly displays the ability of communities to identify, implement and manage a sustainable and self-perpetuating process of LED which can lead to an improvement in overall socioeconomic conditions. It is significant to

note that the strategies are also addressing the gender issue, by empowering women who have been traditionally marginalised (Maleleni, pers. com. 1995). All the farmers at Zamukphila are females, as are the majority in HACOP.

The experience of these rural self-reliance initiatives is clearly encouraging, and the key question which it raises is whether the processes are replicable elsewhere. Whilst recognising the uniqueness of the situation in these communities, there are many key features which could be adapted and applied to other LED strategies. Especially distinctive factors in the study area, which have accounted for the apparent success of initiatives and which make replication difficult, relate to the favourable environmental and antecedent conditions. The general fertility of the Kat River valley, together with the moderately high rainfall and the reliability of flow, have made the environment conducive to small-scale, intensive peasant farming. Antecedent factors include the presence of a skilled labour force which is familiar with local conditions, the presence of abandoned farmland and equipment, a key historical site, areas with considerable tourism potential, and a cadre of respected and capable local leaders.

Despite these favourable aspects, the overall process of community initiated and driven LED is not necessarily dependent on locational variables, nor should it be seen as site-specific. Rather, it is the process of community initiated and owned development which acts as the catalyst and which, in principle, should be replicable in other situations. As experiences from these communities and elsewhere in South Africa reveal, community vision, reconciliation, strong leadership and cooperation in planning for a common future are imperative for successful LED (Nel 1994). Provided that there is some local comparative advantage, and that the basic components of LED are in evidence, it might be argued that these experiences and the process of LED in general, are indeed replicable in other communities. It is also apparent that in many cases, due possibly to local capacity constraints, attempts at LED cannot always be entirely locally driven. Instead, varying degrees of external institutional support, advice and funding may be required to meet shortfalls in local capacity, as indicated in the case of Philani.

The experience of Hertzog, in particular, is an inspirational one. According to HACOP's chairperson, 'we have got to help ourselves, that is the whole thing ... we can't be looking to government ... we must work' (Nkayi, pers. com. 1995). Whilst LED may not be the panacea for all the nation's ills, it is one of a range of strategies which

communities can implement themselves to help address their socio-economic predicaments, and which can be applied to improve conditions and overall levels of welfare in the country. Such community-owned and driven initiatives exemplify the potential which exists when communities identify a problem and take up the development challenge themselves. The success of what has happened also illustrates the viability of the concept of 'development from below' or community-based development, and the significance of mobilising local knowledge and skills. It appears that the essence of this success stemmed from a strong, democratically elected leadership and a commitment to transparency in all activities. Most important, the community evidently feels a strong sense of ownership and is empowered by the development process. Although other communities may lack the unique antecedent conditions of the study area, and may not achieve the same degree of success, there are still important lessons to be learned from the experiences of the Kat River valley communities, and the type of development initiatives which they have pursued.

Such self-reliant development initiatives, in a poverty-stricken rural area, are indicative of what a community can achieve when it works together towards the sustainable use of natural and human resources for the benefit of their society. The research provokes a further question as to what is the most appropriate role, if any, for government in such development initiatives. It seems that governments need to facilitate, rather than dominate, the development process, and offer advice, limited support and modest incentives where appropriate.

While it is recognised that these experiences contain certain unique elements, they do reinforce the 'anti-development' argument, namely that there is scope for a new paradigm of development which draws upon local experience, and does not rely on imposed goals and practices. In order to succeed, such approaches need to be rooted in the culture, ideals and mindsets of the groups engaged in the development process. Ideally, development should foster self-reliance and LED, and as Escobar (1995:212) suggests, 'this can best be achieved by building upon the practices of the social movements... [which] are essential to the creation of alternate visions of democracy, economy and society'. The Mpofu experience clearly indicates the potential which local social movements can have in identifying and pursuing situationally relevant LED. The experience derived from case studies such as these suggests that researchers should not reject the concept of 'development', as some writers have urged, but should rather strive, as Simon (1997) suggests, to formulate 'different paths' to achieve the same goal. This

concurs with calls made by writers such as Edwards (1993), that development research should be 'relevant' and contribute meaningfully to new conceptualisations of development.

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