

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Linking people and their municipality

Community-based organisations play an important role in educating communities, creating awareness and facilitating public participation, as the experience of Impendle shows.

Partnerships between municipalities, ward committees and community-based organisations (CBOs) are important for small communities to flourish. In some areas, development organisations play a useful role in encouraging and facilitating engagements. One such organisation is the Built Environment Support Group (BESG), which assisted CBOs in Impendle in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands to participate in local governance issues.

Impendle Municipality is largely rural, with scattered settlements and traditional dwellings, mainly on Ingonyama Trust and freehold land. About 80% of its income is from national grant funding, provincial government and the Development Bank of South Africa.

Researcher Daniel Bailey says BESG's Deepening Democracy Programme helped facilitate engagements between communities and the Impendle Municipality. Challenges facing Impendle include a high and increasing rate of HIV/Aids, poverty, a huge backlog in public facilities and services, rising unemployment, a lack of municipal capacity and resources, stressed water reserves and high levels of expenditure on transport.

'With unemployment as high as 60%, there is a great dependency on pensions and grants,' says Bailey. 'There is



The CBO community gets together to discuss important issues affecting Impendle.

no industrial activity and most people derive their livelihood through agricultural pursuits.'

The sanitation backlog is about 58% and the refuse removal backlog about 97.5%, with collection provided to only a few ratepayers near the municipal offices. Of the 1 500 km of roads, only 16 km is all-weather, making main roads impassable in wet weather.

BESG's programme works at two levels. The first is to facilitate capacity building to enable more effective communication between government and civil society, and the second level is research and advocacy work to guide the development and implementation of pro-poor enabling policies.

The programme also trains members of CBOs to better understand local government and development legislation.

'BESG started by building the capacity of community-

based organisations under the Kuyasa community leadership development and local government training programme. This is the building block to facilitate interaction between municipal officials and community structures to improve service delivery and the lives of the poor communities,' says Bailey.

It was important for the public to be involved in participation processes and for ward committees to engage different sectors of the community.

With only four wards, the main challenges were great distances and limited access to transport. Public participation usually took the form of 'IDP and budget road shows, with a free meal, and token public meetings'. Information on matters of public interest was not adequately communicated to people, because of physical constraints posed by the mountainous

landscape and rural areas. Ward committees relied on CBOs to hold meetings and give feedback on their behalf.

'There is a history of active CBOs in Impendle, with the role they have played in community development being assimilated into the ward committee processes,' says Bailey.

Mayor of Impendle Sizakele Makhaya has praised the role of CBOs, saying 'some ward committee members don't work, so we need CBOs to fill these gaps'.

Before BESG assisted the CBOs, many members did not know they could participate in public meetings or that ward committee members needed support from the community to be effective. As a result of the project, CBOs and their members feel they can approach councillors and municipal officials. 'Members are exposed to how local

The rural challenge

Rural Impendle Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal is one of South Africa's smallest, and faces enormous challenges that impact on its ability to deliver services and improve the quality of life of citizens.

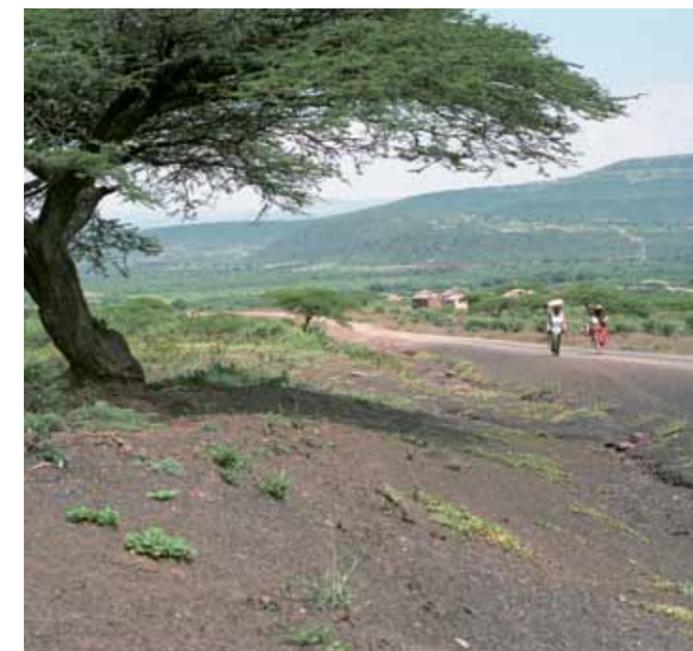
Between 2001 and 2005, only 914 households were serviced with water, 727 with electricity, and 831 VIP toilets built for the estimated population of just under 40 000.

Impendle has not been able to tap into the economic opportunities in neighbouring Msunduzi, the provincial capital and economic hub of the Umgungundlovu District. The poor condition of roads makes commuting difficult and limits investment and local economic development.

The terrain makes the land difficult to service and the cost of providing infrastructure and maintenance services is substantially higher than national averages.

The 2010 IDP review is sobering. HIV is estimated at 44%, and it's highest among those aged 25-29 (39.5%), and 30-34 (36%), which represents the potential labour force.

Only 10% of the workforce (people between the age of 15 and 64) was employed in the formal economy in 2001, implying that every one person working had 20 dependents. About 40% of households had no regular monthly income, and 49% reported income of between R1 and R1 600. More recent research shows an improved average household income of about R2 000, but up to 50% of this is from government grants and subsidies. The municipality receives 80% of its income from grant funding.



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government operates. They are equipped to communicate with officials and ask relevant questions relating to day-to-day issues. They form a link between municipalities and constituents and can source information that benefits communities. For example, accessing the indigent policy,' adds Bailey.

The CBO clusters have become important conduits for municipal information in communities and provide feedback to the municipality from communities. They interact around local economic development, basic infrastructure needs and issues of welfare.

Councillor Sizwe Ndlela said BESG provided training around community-based development and 'assisted with securing network relationships with potential stakeholders'. He added that public participation was

important. 'IDP ward meetings and representatives forums are open platforms for discussion and, with the advice from municipal officials, we can agree based on informed decisions on priority issues and projects.'

Impendle's vision for 2017 is to provide most households with sustainable access to social and economic development needs and basic services in a fully integrated manner. This requires civil society to participate in municipal governance and for the municipality to create a more substantive public participation process.

'Members of CBOs are beginning to interact regularly with their local municipality and sometimes attend council meetings accompanied by our facilitator,' says Bailey. 'Some members are participating in workshops on participatory

Why communities should participate

- Consultation will help council make more appropriate decisions based on the real needs of people
- The more informed people are, the better they will understand what government is trying to do and what the budget and resource limitations are
- Councillors can only claim to be accountable if they have regular interactions with the people they represent and if they consult and report back on key council decisions
- Government cannot address all the development needs on its own and partnerships are needed with communities, civil society and business to improve service delivery and development. (www.etu.org.za)

planning and budgeting, which is the next phase of the programme. The training enables them to ask critical questions of their municipality and better hold their municipality accountable for service delivery.'

Working together

This project is a partnership between :

- Built Environment Support Group
- Impendle Municipality
- The local community

For more information

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Below (L to R): BESG Project Manager (Mbhe Mdlalose) Mayor of uMgungundlova District Municipality (Yusuf Bhamjee) French Embassy Officer (Aurelie Voix) Councillor



Role playing is used to build the confidence and ability of the participants to engage with municipal staff more effectively.



SAFER COMMUNITIES

Community-based justice

A restorative justice initiative brings victims and offenders together and works to reduce crime in areas south of Durban.

The Khulisa Crime Prevention Initiative, in partnership with the South Durban Basin Area Based Management Programme of the eThekweni Municipality, has launched the Wentworth Restorative Justice Project aimed at bringing the concept of 'restorative justice' to the communities of Merebank and Wentworth. Khulisa is a non-profit organisation dedicated to preventing crime through promoting rehabilitation, education, and reconciliation. The organisation uses victim-friendly mediation to bring offenders and victims together with trained mediators to discuss and decide how offenders should be held accountable for their actions.

The Wentworth Restorative Justice Project was launched in November 2009 in the predominantly Coloured and Indian Merewent community, situated 12 kilometres south of Durban city centre. Aside from poverty, the community struggles with other challenges. 'According to the National Prosecuting Authority, the Wentworth Magistrate's Court has an extremely high incidence of crimes in relation to statistics from other courts in the greater Durban area. This is confirmed by the SAPS, who report a high number

of cases relating to domestic violence, public disturbance, gang conflict and violent incidents as a result of drug and alcohol abuse', says South Durban Basin Area Manager, Eurakha Singh.

The project offers the Merewent community an alternative to the judicial system that sends offenders to jail and ignores the victims' need for restitution and closure. This also involves liaising with the criminal justice system role players. The project has helped families and communities to support victims who needed healing, and offenders who want to make amends with victims and the community. In South Africa, many crimes are committed within communities and the victims and perpetrators are known to one another. In general, the project supports the justice system by encouraging and maximising community participation.

According to Singh 'innovative and effective crime prevention strategies have been explored', one of which is restorative justice, which tries to focus on repairing the harm caused by conflict and crime. 'It looks at using alternative methods of dealing with crime, wrongdoing and conflict in the community, and should not be seen as an alternative to punitive

About restorative justice

- Restorative justice views criminal acts more comprehensively and recognises that offenders harm victims, communities and even themselves.
- It recognises the importance of community involvement and leadership in responding to and reducing crime, rather than leaving the problem of crime to the government alone.
- For more information about restorative justice see <http://restorativejustice.org>



Students learning and discussing the concept of restorative justice.



The advanced leadership courses offered to safety ambassadors.

justice, but as a parallel process that seeks to repair or compensate for the harm caused.'

The municipality provided the initial funding for the project, and Khulisa has secured further funding to sustain the project in Merebank and Wentworth.

Offenders are referred to the programme by the local court. The mediator then works with the offender, the victim and their families, ensuring that the issues are resolved and forgiven, and that important life skills and coping mechanisms are learnt so that the situation does not happen again. The mediator facilitates the entire process and the intervention occurs over a period of time. Singh says that having a partner like Khulisa is the reason the project was a success, because of their 'expert knowledge and wide experience in the field of restorative justice'. The successes include reaching 125 offenders plus two families per case to address issues of forgiveness, anger and healing. After-care has also been provided to victims, offenders and their families. The project also reached 40 peer educators in two schools who were trained in coping with anger and finding positive solutions to conflict situations.

However, despite the success of the project, there are some challenges. These included

offenders not arriving for mediation, participants being unreachable after mediation, parties being unable to reach an agreement, agreements being violated, and parties violating the rules of mediation.

As the project continues, youth leaders in the Merewent community are being encouraged to run community crime prevention workshops as well as awareness programmes in their communities, contributing to bringing down crime.

Working together

This project is a partnership between

- eThekweni Municipality
- Khulisa Crime Prevention Initiative
- Wentworth community

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