



## Community involvement – Ga-Motlatla village

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GA-MOTLATLA IS A village of approximately 600 households situated about 40 km west of Ventersdorp in the Northwest Province in South Africa. This village has transformed itself in a period of about 4 years from a totally neglected “black spot” settlement to a thriving community with basic services of water, electricity, automatic telephones, communal gardens and controlled (fenced) ranches for community herds. The seed for the success was sowed through the Ga-Motlatla Village Development project which was initiated by the Independent Development Trust under its Relief Development Programme during the drought in 1992.

This paper examines the approach to the involvement of the community in the project and argues that the innovative and flexible manner in which this was done is directly responsible for the ability of the community, not only to sustain the projects long beyond the relief period but, in addition, to initiate other development projects that have transformed the Village to what it is today.

### Background

During 1991 and 1992, South Africa was in the grip of one of the most severe droughts in living memory. The Independent Development Trust (IDT) which had been set up with a grant from the state as an NGO and had started operating in 1991, decided to use some of its development funds to alleviate the suffering caused by the drought.

The effects of the drought were felt most severely by rural communities, who depended for their livelihood on subsistence farming or who had been employed on commercial farms, many of which were no longer able to keep them due to reduced productivity. Unemployment and starvation became rampant in the rural areas.

The IDT took a decision not to give its assistance in the form of handouts and food packages but to assist the communities to employ themselves and earn a minimal daily wage while creating an asset which would continue to benefit them in the future. The Trust named its initiative the Relief Development Programme. It then made available an amount of R242 000-00 (US\$ 77 400, 1992) for a development project for the Ga-Motlatla community. Among the conditions of this grant was that there had to be total community participation and full community control of the project and that capacity building to ensure that the community would be able to undertake, on a sustainable basis, the maintenance of the assets created and in fact create more assets in future. Makhetha Development Consultants were appointed by the IDT to facili-

tate the process of community involvement and the execution of the project.

### Approach to community participation

#### Community participation issues

The project was to be a test case for total community participation and community control. The IDT only made a budget available to the community. Decisions on how much of the budget to allocate to different activities, how to implement the projects, how to ensure equitable employment opportunities, how much to pay the labour (up to a maximum limit set by the IDT) and ultimately how to run the projects were all left to the community. The consultants were only to offer guidance and assistance but not to overrule the wishes of the community.

The project, being a relief development effort, aimed at alleviating the suffering caused by the drought, had to be implemented as quickly as possible while ensuring that proper project management structures were in place.

#### Involvement of all interest groups

In order to ensure that all interest groups were involved, information was disseminated to all the community organisations and political groups active in the village. This included a worker's association which is based in SOWETO, 200 km away from the village, and which is patronised by all the village residents employed in the Gauteng area. Government Departments, the then Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) Community Services branch in Potchefstroom, the Department of Land Affairs, Department of Agriculture etc., were all involved as interest groups in the Village. A project management team was then formed which was made up of members from most of the village organisations and the Tribal Authority.

#### Community empowerment

From the beginning of the Project it was clear that the community representatives were not able to participate on “equal” terms with their counterparts from the government and other organisations. Training was therefore implemented at the beginning to enhance their competence in, among others, the principles of budgeting, operation of a bank account, procedures for the ordering, receiving, storage and disbursement of materials, tender invitations and tender adjudication. Training was also given on the project management aspects of supervision, time keeping, task allocation and measurement, and report writing.

### **Project choice**

Armed with a budget and an understanding of the financial implications of each choice, the community were then charged with the task of identifying which projects to undertake. The following list of priorities was finally agreed with the community:

- Payment of the labour component of a water reticulation project (materials funded by the Department of Land Affairs) and the extension of the project from 2km of reticulation to 10km.
- Fencing of graveyards.
- Construction of an irrigated vegetable garden.

### **Flexibility and accommodation of community needs**

The community and the IDT signed a project funding agreement on the basis of the above priority list. After the agreement had been finalised, the training aspect of the project were initiated. The community were trained as indicated above. Before the completion of the training programme, an incident that changed the priorities of the community occurred.

Some of the cattle of the community were impounded by a neighbouring white farmer after they had caused damage to his crops. The arbitrary fines imposed by the farmer were very high (up to confiscation of some of the cattle) and the community decided to use whatever funds they could find to fence their ranches as a priority.

Although this had not been identified earlier as one of the projects, the IDT recognised that since the fencing was the current and emotional priority in the community, and to try and start another project would not be successful as the community would not participate whole heartedly. A new agreement was therefore quickly finalised and the fencing project was started.

The water project was then implemented as the second project with the remaining funds.

### **Joint process establishment**

The process of delivery for each of the projects was proposed by the community and after deliberations and sometimes, modifications for proper management and accountability procedures, was agreed between the community and the IDT.

Decisions about the number of people to be employed and how much they should be paid, and the extent of external technical input were all jointly made with the community.

Tasks, targets and deadlines were all agreed jointly and the commitment of the community members was sought and agreed in each case.

### **Implementation**

The community committee look full control of the implementation of the various projects done under the fund and all the technical input and external project management

inputs were seen as a resource that the community could draw on.

The work on all the projects, once agreed with the IDT, was completed within the budget and on time, labour was sourced from within the community and the management was done by specially appointed representatives. The finances were controlled by the committee, they generated purchase orders and wrote cheques and accounted both to the community and the IDT through monthly statements and bank reconciliations. The final documents of the community finances tallied right up to the interest earned from the bank on their account.

They managed the entire material purchase and storage for the project.

The projects were very successful because of the extent of the empowerment and control that the community was afforded.

Time was devoted to ensuring that the committee was adequately empowered to handle the tasks assigned to them. On the job training was carried out throughout the project and was accessible at all times.

Because of the strong sense of ownership and control, the community decided to cut their own wages in the last months of implementation so that the funds could be able to provide the same amount of water reticulation even though some money had been used for fencing. (This was decided in a mass meeting and confirmed by the consultants). The IDT subsequently agreed to a top up funding to restore the wages of the community after the community had demonstrated this willingness to sacrifice for their own good.

### **Other assets created**

The process of community participation in this project raised the confidence of the community to an extent that they started using their skills in negotiating with other funders and government agencies. They had copies of all their project reports, financial reports, training certificates and above all, a successful project which they could show as evidence of their competence. The following development projects were subsequently undertaken by the project committee.

Two staff houses were built at the village primary school to accommodate teachers who came from outside the village and to improve security by having some people permanently resident within the school grounds.

The community hall was fenced and rehabilitated and additional offices for the tribal authority and the Community Development Committee (which was now a permanent feature of the village).

An electrification project was completed at highly reduce costs as the community sought funds elsewhere to erect the poles and the Electricity Supply Commission (Eskom) provided the expertise and technical advise while the villagers did most of the work themselves.

The village has an automatic telephone system which also resulted from negotiation by the community develop-

ment committee with the South African Telecommunications Corporation (Telkom).

The access road to the village was improved through a process where the TPA provided the machines and drivers and the community provided the labour, the food for drivers and the diesel required for the trucks and machines.

### Summary of important lessons

This project has been among the most successful undertaken by the Relief Development Programme of the IDT. The success can be attributed to the following:

- Total commitment on the part of the IDT to community participation and control. The IDT had the advantage that it was both funder and implementer and therefore could ensure that its principles were implemented on the ground. In many cases, the funders, may be committed to community participation but the agency responsible for implementation, usually for a fee, and the community may put such pressure that participation becomes tokenism.
- Involvement of the community at all stages in a meaningful manner. The community was not just involved in ratifying decisions but in actually making them. This was all the way from deciding on projects to budgeting for them, to implementing them.
- Positive efforts to empower the community to participate meaningfully. There was no undue pressure on the community to meet deadlines planned and programmed by some outside consultants. The community was setting its own pace and adequate time was given to the training and empowerment aspects of the work. On the job training continued throughout the project period.

- Respect for the dynamic nature of community participation and an accommodation of their changing needs. The ability of the programme to adapt to changing needs in the community, including accommodation of changing priorities with time, helped in ensuring that the community was supportive of all the efforts at all times as they could foresee tangible benefits in each area of priority.
- Recognition encouragement and utilisation of community resources. The programme recognised that communities had resources that they have been exploiting for ages and these should be incorporated into projects. The fact that they had been organising themselves around their agricultural activities, for example, could be a good entry point for community organisation for development work.
- Commitment from all involved parties in ensuring the success of both the “process” and the “product”. A good balance was maintained at all times between the social issues and the processes for hard delivery. Because of commitment from all sides, most of the processes occurred smoothly.

#### Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and are based on his direct involvement with the project and the community. They do not represent those of the Independent Development Trust or any of its agencies.

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