

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: a partnership to tap into scarce skills

INTRODUCTION:

Let me take this opportunity to thank the chairman of Project Gateway for inviting me to this ceremony. I also want to thank members of the executive, the staff of Gateway and all the people that make this project what it is. I am grateful to speak to you just four days after the SABC conducted an audit on the performance of the President and his cabinet after 100 days in office.

Some of the issues raised were:

- Job creation
- Bailout strategy
- Investment and markets
- Recession
- Intervention with civil society

I would like to challenge us to think seriously about the development needs of the people of South Africa. The challenges I would like to bring before you today are, 'Partnership in Development, and Tapping into Scarce Skills', but before I do that I would like to pay tribute to the work done by the NGO sector in South Africa - including yours. Though often referred to as **misguided missiles** because they sometimes hit the target and at other times miss it. Nonetheless this sector has played a tremendous role in our country through the years as a substitute for government especially in the area of skills development and service delivery. Without a time let me speak on what I proposed.

1. PARTNERSHIP IN DEVELOPMENT

David Korten, a world renowned author of several books in the area of development and himself a development specialist practitioner. - Please note that there are two types of specialists in almost all fields; theoretical specialists, those who specialise in development of theories in their respective fields and specialist practitioners who specialise in practice. Korten is both - He defines development as:

“A process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilise and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.” (Korten: Getting to the 21st Century, P. 67). Korten’s definition is precise. His definition focuses on three issues; members of a society, personal and institutional capacity building and mobilisation and management of resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations. Robert Chambers another authority in development has mapped out a pathway for development in his book entitled; “Rural Development: Putting the Last First”. Development is about people and not structures. All utilities serve the interests of the people. Without people there is no development. It was common practise in the past that development practitioners in the form of AID agencies neglected this very important aspect which development of partnership. Korten describes such agencies or individuals as being preoccupied with projects and compete for the rights of ownership of the poor to the exclusion of the very people they exist to serve. If and when they do consult it is not to seek cooperation but to coerce members of the community to accept their programs. And this is driven in most cases by resources and the power to control. Any person who dangles the purse has the final say. Development is the quest to increase the capacity of individuals and institutions in the community so that the members of the community can produce and manage their resources to sustain themselves. It is a life long partnership. It is a walk me strategy.

Talk show hosts, journalists and communication experts repeatedly use an African idiom that says: If you want to travel fast travel alone but if you want to travel far then take a friend with. A friend once asked why do black people destroyed property that is meant to help them like school buildings and community halls? My answer to the question was that they see these structures as an extension of oppression and not liberation. They do not see themselves as part of the structures that constructed them and therefore not as owners. Experience has taught me that if people are involved in creating their future, they will own that creation and will never destroy it. The buzz word today is **sustainability**. What is it that sustainability is so often not realised? One of the reasons are attribute to that is fear. It is the fear by

funding agencies that the project will not be implemented successfully; it is fear to transfer power and management control to people in the community and it is fear that they might be disagreement.

In “Asikhulume”, a talk show program hosted by Xolani Gwala on Sunday afternoons, a question was raised about civil intervention. Guests to the show were asked whether government was doing enough to consult with people on the ground to find out what their needs were before rolling out a program. The answer was yes the President is consulting. Without becoming the spokesperson for the president, the answer is correct. We are beginning to see an intention and a willingness from government to find out what the people’s needs are before intervening. Civil intervention means engaging the community in order to get their views before embarking on a program of action to ensure relevance. Civil intervention is travelling the road together whether the road proves to be even or difficult to navigate. Civil intervention is a partnership in which people share ideas, resources and encourage one another. But travelling together has some challenges. What are some of these challenges in a partnership? Recall Joseph’s advice to his brothers as they returned to their country after he instructed them to bring his father and mother to Egypt. He warned them not to quarrel on the way (Genesis 45:24)

Partnerships are often plagued by arguments, confrontations or even quarrels especially if the road ahead is not known. Partnerships may also give rise to opposition when people’s ideas are not congruent. Negative aspects of a partnership should not discourage us but should be a cause for interrogation and reflection. We should ask why others see things the way they do and reflect on how their ideas could be accommodated. Engaging civil society ensures that programs and projects are on track. These interventions also ensure that projects and programs meet the needs of the community. Intervention is development with and not development for the people.

Fear that the project will not be implemented successfully, that funds will not be utilised efficiently and that the project will not be sustainable are often realistic depending on the nature of the project. Funding agencies to be more specific are concerned that what they start will be sustainable and to overcome the challenge that the project might collapse or fail, they bring someone from their circles to oversee the project. There is nothing wrong

with this as it ensures that the project is implemented to the satisfaction of the people who provide the funds. But what often happens is that bulk of the money intended for the project ends up paying for expenses of the person who is sent to help.

The other challenge is needs analysis. Another critical issue that I referred to in Korten's definition was mobilisation and management of resources consistent with people's aspirations. It is sometimes sad to discover that people are busy with a project that does not really meet the needs of the people. Why is this so? It is because a project worked elsewhere and therefore will work here also. There is no guarantee that a project that was successfully implemented elsewhere will work in another context. Let me give an example. A colleague shared with me how successful a project to raise rabbits was in Corte D' Voire. To his amazement I told him how that project could not work in South Africa, perhaps I was wrong I must apologise, it could work if tried but South Africans are not schooled in rearing and eating rabbit meat. Rabbits multiply rapidly and are good to eat. Probably you should try this project here at Gateway. It might solve our problems of food shortage. This leads me to my second challenge and that is:

2. TAPPING INTO SCARCE SKILLS

I was shocked to realise that some leaders were still thinking of training people in husbandry that is, raising chicken, selling eggs, garment making etc. Some are still pursuing training people in construction skills. These are essential skills that will improve the quality of lives and alleviate poverty if implemented in a small scale targeting households. Training in construction skills like we used to do is overdue. We probably need to focus more on training people to be engineers. The good thing with regard to training in South African is that any training provider can produce their training material and submit it to the South African Qualifications Authority for accreditation. Once approved the material becomes a national asset with an accreditation number that becomes available to anyone to use. The sky is the limit in training. The times have changed and the programs must also change to accommodate current needs. NGOs need to take stock and evaluate what they provide in the area of skills development and if need be re-define the goals and objectives in order to remain relevant to the needs of the communities they serve. It is good to think for the people but

it is best to think with the people. I would like to refer you to the words which I read in Deuteronomy 8:18. By the way I am both a Christian and a pastor. So do not be surprised if I keep quoting from the Bible. Paraphrased this verse reads: "God gives people the ability to create wealth".

From the list I read under the issues raised in the SABC talk show, "ASIKHULUME" I will extrapolate a few which are Job creation, bail out strategy and interventions with civic society. To this I will add food security and energy sources. I have already spoken at length about interventions and civil society.

The question we should be asking ourselves in this era is what can turn South Africa around? Statistics show that the number of people losing jobs and entering the unemployment category is increasing. The chances that foreign companies will come to South Africa and create employment are bleak. What can make South Africa meet the needs of its people? We all agree that it is skills development but what skills? We cannot all be contractors or dress makers or caterers. I have always argued that any person in the world who can come up with a formula to create jobs, that individual could be a millionaire in a day. This is what I call scarce skills. Job creation requires a critical skills audit with an intention to zero in on scarce skills training.

We need to create a viable economy through skills training. Food security is critical for our survival. What food supplements can we produce to fight poverty? I have already mentioned rabbits. What else aquaculture which is fish industry. The KZN government has embarked on a "ONE HOME ONE GARDEN" project to reduce the level of dependency and up food supplies in the homes. Let us focus on what improves lives and sustains communities. Let us train people in scarce skills. Not only is production essential, preservation and processing is key also. People must be given skills in the preservation of vegetables and processing of food not only for consumption but for export also.

Training should also be geared towards the provision of energy sources. The world is now looking to create environmentally friendly energy supplements for electrifying communities and for transport than coal and oil which leaves

behind unperishable deposits. NGOs should be encouraging people to consider training in bio-fuels.

Other scarce skills such as engineering, accounting, health etc require training that goes beyond the scope of NGOs and require extensive periods of time to acquire.

The wealth that I referred to in Deuteronomy relates in that context to money. In your context the wealth that you create is knowledge and skills that comes through training. This wealth is not an individual possession to be usurped or monopolised by singularity but to be distributed and shared by all. The ability that God gives us to create wealth does not benefit us only as individuals but is meant to spill over and benefit others also. It is a wealth to build a community; a community embraced by families, colleagues, workforce and neighbours to develop and sustain life. Community is strengthened by a shared vision. No man is an island. Someone said without a vision people perish but without people the vision will not be realised. The vision to build Gateway Community Projects was to enable the people of Pietermaritzburg to create wealth that will sustain them. It was a vision Piet Dreyer and others pursued to establish this facility to empower people by transferring the much needed skills to enable them to develop themselves thus creating community. The late Rev Leon Sullivan whom I worked for started a program that helped people to help themselves. This became the motto for the NGO that he founded the "Opportunities Industrialization Centers International (OICI)". To end my talk I will quote from Korten's definition again that development is upping the skills of people in relation to their aspirations. When I director of the SA-OIC program we trained someone who at the end of the program came to us and offered to sell the training kit back to us that was given for use at the end of the program because he did not need it. We offered someone training that they did not value or aspire. Let us not fall into the same trap of offering skills that people no longer require or value. Let us research and evaluate before undertaking training. Thank you and God bless.