



IN PROFILE: GREATER KWAMAKHUTHA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION— A STORY OF CHANGE

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According to the Democracy Development Program (DDP), responsible and responsive governance assumes the following key aspects in the context of enabling communities:

- a) Allows citizens to determine their own path of development, as key drivers of the process, and with government and its agencies as enablers.
- b) Strengthens capacities of organisations, whether civil society or government, and their agencies to work as partners through meaningful engagement mechanisms.
- c) Allows for diverse flexible organisational alliances that harness greater accountability at many levels and commitment towards any causes of their choice, be they processes or projects.
- d) Upholds transparency and commitment to a cause by organisations, as core tenets of their functionality. In this case, proper accountability mechanisms are defined and consequences are spelt out for any deviations from agreed commitments.

IN LIGHT OF dwindling financial resources and a limited state response to ever-growing development challenges, civil society organisations have had to reconfigure their approach to development and reconceptualise alternatives. This is towards enhancing the power of civil society to take ownership of development and deliver on its mandate, based on the values of humanity, social justice and empathy. The power of such an approach lies in a collective understanding at community level that citizens must organise and collectively commit to owning their community development and co-create sustainable, co-owned communities.

For decades, local economic development has been largely dependent on the state and donor communities. Recessions, ailing economies and developmental challenges, including chronic poverty, unemployment and sharp inequalities between the rich and the poor, have sapped the hope of

many citizens globally, particularly within poor and marginalised communities. This paper's premise is that communities need to transcend the mindset of hopelessness to one filled with hope and possibility. In so doing, citizens will be able to reclaim control of their own sustainable economic development trajectory, for their benefit as well as for that of future generations. This means that communities are capable of reconceptualising an ideal society best suited to their local needs, where accountability is harnessed and everyone is actively involved in building the community. This paper presents an account of one community organisation, the KwaMakhutha Community Foundation (GKCF), and its transition, assisted by the DDP that acted as an enabler of the process of change. This transition affirms the fact that communities can take ownership of their own destiny when they make a commitment to re-create a community they proudly co-own.

ENABLING CHANGE IN GKFC

For the last two decades, the DDP has learnt that communities develop when citizens take ownership of their own development and growth. For a long time, communities were rendered ineffective because they depended on external sources, such as development agencies, government and donors, to define their journey. Such dependency on external sources results in communities staying subservient, weak and unproductive, unable to do anything on their own. Realising this, the DDP developed a methodology of engagement, which aims to capacitate citizens to take ownership of their individual and community growth. Citizens become more aware of their inherent potential to re-create co-owned communities where accountability is in place. Accountability refers to when individuals are held responsible for their actions and commitments they make towards a cause. In the context of DDP's work with communities, accountability is made visible when responsibilities are identified and established between mutual parties to harness their commitment.

The GKCF is a fairly new organisation, established in 2014, and is made up of individuals who are committed to bringing about positive change in the community of KwaMakhutha and surrounding areas. The community has more than a hundred members, including youth, women, the physically challenged, business people, African foreign nationals, community-based development practitioners and elected local political representatives. The GKCF had to develop its own constitution, register formally with the Department of Social Development as a non-profit organisation, establish its own leadership structure and recruit community members to join the organisation. These processes were put in place to ensure responsive and responsible governance as a key ingredient for long-term empowerment.

GKCF'S JOURNEY WITH THE DDP

In November 2014, the DDP and the GKCF began their journey, after months of deliberation and conceptualisation around the nature of the relationship and the responsibilities of the two partners going forward. The first step in consolidating the relation was a strategic planning workshop offered by the DDP to the GKCF. The workshop's aim was to capacitate GKCF members through knowledge-sharing exercises on some of the following themes: how organisations function, accountability mechanisms, community development, communication skills and building leadership. Since the intervention, the GKCF has made significant steps in responding to community development challenges in KwaMakhutha and its environs. Some of the activities to date include:

- ✦ Greening KwaMakhutha: a tree-planting initiative that involved most community members volunteering regularly to plant trees around their neighbourhoods.
- ✦ Convening community dialogues: in collaboration with the DDP, three major community dialogues looked at: local economic development in townships; business–community inter-relationships; and integrated development planning processes, in particular community engagement in local development processes.

The DDP continues to support the GKCF with ongoing capacity development in terms of building the organisation's ability to execute its vision and enhance its performance in serving the community. The DDP's role is that of an enabler, not a determiner, of the development path GKCF chooses. Furthermore, the DDP's understanding of responsible governance has enabled GKCF to define how it interacts with the various stakeholders, including businesses, school governing boards,

municipal departments, government departments, security agencies, traditional leadership and religious organisations. Active alliances with all these stakeholders benefit the community in many ways and strengthen relationships as partners working towards a common ideal.

GKCF AND ITS ROLE IN BUILDING RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

The journey with the DDP has assisted GKCF in many ways:

Firstly, GKCF has successfully formed alliances with other organisations in the area and has initiated a number of working relationships with clear terms of reference and action plans. It has established functional links with local and provincial government, as partners in responding to community challenges and needs. For instance, GKCF recently intervened in a civil protest whereby community members were unhappy because of the ongoing demarcation process, claiming that the local government had not consulted adequately with them to explain the reasons behind the process and its impact on them as a community. As a result of the GKCF's response to the crisis, the MEC of Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, Mr. Thembinkosi Willies Mchunu, visited the community and publicly acknowledged GKCF's speedy intervention in quelling the protest. The MEC also committed his department to work in partnership with GKCF to organise a series of transformational dialogues to address such issues as demarcation and community safety. The MEC's visit to KwaMakhutha was the first one by a senior

government representative since the elections in May 2014. The GKCF demonstrated its capacity to demand accountability from government departments and showed leadership in responding to such a volatile crisis using non-violent means.

Secondly, GKCF has harnessed community commitment to its vision and support towards the various development projects. Thirdly, GKCF has established a leadership structure that provides clear direction towards identified tasks and projects. The core leadership gives guidance to the various commissions, which are responsible for a range of development projects in the community. Finally, regular community-led meetings are hosted by GKCF to update community members of the work done and to respond to various community concerns. These abilities, which are embedded within the GKCF, have many positive spin-offs for members of the community, including:

- ✦ Raising individual awareness of their responsibility towards sustainable development of their own community.
- ✦ Inculcating the culture of active citizenry among community members.
- ✦ Entrenching a culture of co-ownership of community development processes.
- ✦ Cultivating a servant-leadership, in which responsibilities are co-shared based on the values of accountability and respect for their own community.
- ✦ Establishing a network of alliances between grassroots community organisations and other structures in their area, such as war rooms¹, traditional leadership, school governing boards, business associations and religious communities.

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LESSONS LEARNT

- ✦ Grassroots community organisations can effectively and responsibly govern their own

development practices, with the support of external organisations acting as enablers.

- ✦ Enabling organisations should give grassroots organisations adequate space and time to chart their own path. The notion of ‘walking with’, rather than ‘being the saviour’ of any community process is key to building resilience among community organisations.
- ✦ Enabling organisations should not determine the direction to be taken by the grassroots organisations, as this approach may be disempowering, create dependency and dilute the ultimate impact of community development.
- ✦ Building alliances should not be disempowering, with partners seen as unequal and discriminative. Rather alliances should build on each other’s strengths and promote sharing of resources, such as expertise, staff and informational material to build community sustainably.

CONCLUSION

In its efforts to create a viable partnership with a grassroots community organisation, the DDP has provided capacity-enhancement support to the GKCF, focusing on accountability, communication, commitment and good governance as essential pillars of a sustainable organisation. The GKCF has demonstrated that community-led organisations have the capacity to re-create their own communities and harness commitment from community members to join hands in the process. The DDP remains aware of its enabling role and is committed to walking with GKCF on its journey into the future. This paper is a reflection of this process of awakening and walking with one such organisation, and the lasting impact of building a resilient, responsible and responsive system of internal governance.

NOTES

¹ War rooms are structures established by government at the ward level to respond to community concerns and issues.