

## **Asset Based Community-Driven Development (ABCD) – using church assets for greater good**

“Communities are often blind to their own worth and potential ... helping communities to see themselves more fully is critical.” (Doug Reeler)

It has long been acknowledged that focussing on just the physical needs of a person or community will not provide sustainable solutions to the evils of unemployment and poverty.

Unless people are placed at the centre of their own development and provided with tools to help them unlock and unblock their own potential, we will never be able to address the issues of inequality and social exclusion.

In our experience at the Ikhala Trust the issue is more often than not a lack of resources, but rather about in whose hands these resources are and how they are utilised.

Working together with individuals and communities yields amazing results as we have witnessed in our years of working throughout the Eastern Cape.

Whilst there are well-intended sectors of society, such as churches, local government and some corporates who devise programmes for the poor, this often leads to frustration as they have short term solutions and are often not sustainable.

Doing for the poor and not with the poor is undermining their integrity and their ability to act and think independently.

It also often leads to those who mean well to feel disillusioned as their programmes are not taking effect.

We define poverty in three ways: Poverty of the Mind, Poverty of the Spirit and Poverty of the Stomach or material poverty.

It is relatively easy to address material poverty (in the short term at least), but the other two poverties are actually what is keeping people trapped in their own cycle of material poverty.

They are sometimes just not able to see themselves as valuable members of society and feel that they have nothing to contribute to improve their situations.

When there is no poverty of mind and spirit, people are resilient, they act and are able to innovate and find their own solutions.

This poverty of mind and spirit is one of the results of poverty programmes which are developed for people without their input and involvement. There are bound to have negative consequences.

There are many examples of successful development programmes which have been implemented in partnership with the community.

“By determining all the human assets in our community and the collective effort of volunteers and their assets, we are changing our town.

“In addition to their social grants, at least 60 families have a permanent monthly income as a person in the family has been upskilled through grants received from Ikhala Trust.” – Teresa Opperman, Project Leader: Hugs of Hope, a community-based organisation in Hofmeyr in the Eastern Cape following Asset-Based Community Development training conducted by Ikhala in November 2017.

Ikhala Trust has operated since 2002 in the Eastern Cape, working mainly with small and potentially mighty community-based organisations.

This includes church-based organisations.

Named after the Xhosa word for the healing Aloe plant, which is native to the area, Ikhala has been at the vanguard of a radical approach to development assistance which represents a clear departure from conventional philanthropic efforts.

Its grant-making ethos is about valuing and investing in people and their assets while helping communities to develop their own relationships and networks with outside organisations in order to sustain their work.

Ikhala operates from the assumption that “everyone has something to give”, whether this be time, money or other resources.

It also holds the view that actions to mobilise these assets represent an expression of deep-rooted African communal traditions around giving and helping.

In this regard, the Trust seeks to foster the potential of “horizontal” community philanthropy as a foundation for building a thriving civil society.

Ikhala not only provides scale-appropriate small grants, it also mentors and accompanies potential “movers and shakers” in the community, helping them to organise; and uses its influence to push non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donors, local governments and corporates to respond with empathy to local initiatives and requests.

In adopting a “community philanthropy” approach which seeks to support people in their efforts to help each other, Ikhala tries to “go where the energy is”.

It identifies groups who are innovative and resourceful in helping others and works with them to build their capacity to be equal partners with outside organisations, so that they can continue to implement their mission in a sustainable way.

When the approach succeeds, a subtle but important power shift occurs: as community organisations start to recognise their agency and appreciate their existing assets and capabilities, so also outsiders begin to acknowledge what these communities have to offer.

So, if we all adopt the attitude of looking at the glass half full and not half empty. we would already have made great strides in finding sustainable long lasting community driven development solutions.

In many cases it is the churches which have the “half full” assets in the form of buildings, land and other infrastructure.

This should be used for more than services, weddings and funerals – it should be seen as a community asset which can help raise the people around the church out of poverty.

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