



social development

Department:
Social Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

‘Setting up Projects’: Lessons from DSD

Second Economy Strategy conference
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Background

- Two year research programme to evaluate DSD services and projects in ISRDP and URP nodes
- Evaluations in mid 2006 and early 2008
- Focus on Poverty Relief Programme (PRP) projects
- Participatory assessment with project members, beneficiaries and DSD officials
- 86 projects in 1st evaluation, and 62 revisited in 2nd evaluation

Key issues

- Business plans
- Beneficiary/member selection
- Training and support
- M&E and learning

Business plans

- Generally abstract and too ambitious – insufficient work done on analysing conditions in which the project will operate
- Mostly done by consultants and imposed on members, thus not taking members skills, knowledge, limitations and contextual factors into account
- Projects locked into entrepreneurship framework when needs are more diverse

Business plans - lessons

- **Iterative** business plans that start small and expand with success
- **Participatory** identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities with members and **facilitate** planning by members
- **Don't assume small business model** in every case – needs might be better served by offering other interventions, even if still in project form (e.g. home-based care, food security with possibility but not imperative for income generation, etc)
- Adopt a **livelihoods framework** to identify and build assets which include, but are not limited to, income

Beneficiary/member selection

- Projects that emerged from existing activities in communities were more sustainable and tenacious than those that were started new
- Many projects initiated with members who never knew or worked with each other before
- Projects tended to be run by a small core group in a relatively undemocratic way - often the pioneers of the project who 'owned' it

Beneficiary/member selection - lessons

- Build on **existing initiatives** rather than starting new projects
- If income generating projects are to be businesses, not everyone can be a member: **division** between members who get dividends (owners) and workers who get regular wages
- **Members to choose** who they want to work with

Training and support

- Project members did receive training, but not always relevant, appropriate or practically useful
- Key training needs: financial management, project management, OD, technical
- Weak links between projects and service providers, including government departments
- Very poor integration of support to projects

Training and support - lessons

- **Sequenced training** so that information/training is provided when needed
- **Skills audit** of project members and broader before start of projects so that skills and knowledge of local population can be mobilised to assist projects
- Government departments and other service providers develop **support plans on basis of requirements** of projects – NB role of municipalities in co-ordinating information about projects in their area of jurisdiction and sharing with relevant service providers
- Issue of **aligning planning and budgeting processes** in municipalities and departments

M&E and learning

- M&E systems externally generated
- Focused on reporting on funds spent and upward accountability
- Projects not interacting with each other to learn

M&E and learning - lessons

- Develop participatory M&E system that permits members to monitor own performance and draw lessons from it
- Link M&E into a learning framework – reflection time required (both in government departments and in projects)
- More interaction between projects for peer-to-peer learning

Comments

- Does expenditure of public money on projects justify outcomes (return on investment), especially when few people benefit?
- Emphasis on projects that have a wide base of beneficiaries – and these are mostly social services
- Need some link into formal systems of governance to enable ongoing funding and support appropriate to ongoing provision of services
- Necessary to reconceptualise approach to projects so that strengthening livelihood assets is the objective (of which income generation may be a part, but not the whole)