

BOKFONTEIN – BUILDING A FUTURE

The Community Work Programme provided people resettled in Bokfontein with a structure to rebuild their lives after being removed from their ancestral land. The area has also become an example of how people from different backgrounds can live in peace while working for a common goal – a better life for themselves and their children.

“An unanticipated move. A time to start all over.” These are some of the phrases used by the people of Bokfontein in October 2005 as they thought about an uncertain future. They were being moved from their land to make way for new developments in the Hartebeespoort Dam area. While they were loading all their belongings into the removal trucks, the reality of being uprooted from the land they had considered their ancestral home for many years struck them.

Today, six years after being moved to Bokfontein – a small farming area 7km from the town of Brits in North West Province – they still recall the buzzing sound of removal trucks heading towards the so-called “Promised Land”. The piercing, loud sound of hammers forcing in the nails through corrugated iron sheets filled the air as they tried to build their shacks on the stands. They had no choice; they simply had to brace themselves for a new start.

A stranger driving by the area a few years ago would probably have wondered how these families managed to make a living. However, their poor living conditions were changed for the better after the establishment of a CWP site in July 2008. The idea of forming the CWP was mooted earlier that year during an Organisational Workshop, an intensive three-week programme of leadership and skills development.

Before the workshop, there were many problems in Bokfontein. The area had no proper roads or streets because people had built their homes all over the place without following a proper plan. The local municipality could not provide water and electricity to the community. People were used to the clicking sounds of R2 coins as they descended on neighboring farms to buy 25-litre portions of water for R2. But exactly how much water is needed to fulfill the needs of a family of four each day? How many litres are enough? These were the sort of questions that families were forced to grapple with and they tried to make do in hard times.

Things started to change after the CWP was launched and the Bokfontein Development Forum (BDF) was

set up. The positive energy that came with these moves gave birth to the name “Tshaba-di-Maketse” – bodily engraved on one of the pillars at the entrance of the area – and literally translated as “the nations are amazed”.

Visitors are not likely to miss CWP participants working like productive ants as they construct a 5km road into the area. They are using slabs donated by a tombstone factory and norite rocks from Herculite Ferrochrome.

The construction of the road could not have been possible without the installation of water tanks by CWP. The sound of clicking R2 coins has faded away as five water tanks and one tap per household have been installed in the area as a solution to the water scarcity problem. The sight of women pushing wheelbarrows to fetch water from the water tanks will soon be a thing of the past as CWP plans to upgrade the capacity of the water pump.

Other CWP projects that benefit the community include cleaning, food gardens, school patrol services and recycling.

CWP participants could not see the point of cleaning and throwing all the waste away when there are ways of using this to their advantage. A call was made to the Department of Environmental Affairs to facilitate the training of participants on effective recycling methods and compost production.

Compost beds are made up of dried grass, paper and decomposed domestic waste. “Bring over green bottles to this side,” called Elizabeth Mohlatole, a participant to other participants who were sorting out waste collected from the “one steel tank per second household project”, which was initiated by CWP in support of the then burdened municipal waste management services. Brightly coloured “swinging steel tanks” used as waste bins can be seen in every street of Bokfontein.

Women in goggles, ears fully fitted with protective earplugs and armed with cobblestones crush bottles



and tins used as part of the recycling project. Proceeds made from recycled materials are used to support home-base care patients and an early childhood development centre in the area. Home-based care patients also benefit from CWP food gardens. Vegetable tunnels that were donated by the Department of Social Development to community members are now being used in CWP food gardens.

“He can’t walk and it’s time for his bath,” said Sylvia Mathonsi, pushing a wheelbarrow with two full plastic tanks of water into a yard of one of the patients. Participants compiled a CWP home-based care database by going door-to-door and the Department of Health trains participants.

“A proposal has been forwarded to the Department of Health for a mobile clinic,” said King-George Mohlala, the CWP manager in Bokfontein. “The most interesting story about the home-based care is that the Department of Health has recently adopted CWP participants who will be benefit from a much higher stipend from July 2011, this is indeed a great achievement for the community of Bokfontein,” says Mohlala with a broad smile on his face.

When CWP was introduced, many people could not participate as they did not have money for childminders or crèche facilities. CWP participants agreed to build a structure that is now being used as a creche.

“Good morning mama,” a lovely little voice came through corrugated iron sheets used to build the centre. Giggling sounds followed. The children seemed happy and healthy. The centre accommodates up to 65 children and parents contribute R50 a month. “It is really nothing compared to what our children are benefitting from this CWP centre,” said Patricia Ramoadi, a parent, who is also a participant.

There is only one primary school, which is 3km from Bokfontein. Children benefit from patrol services offered by CWP participants. CWP participants hold children’s hands and make sure that they get to the bus stop and into the bus safely. In addition, these patrols have gone a long way in making sure that there are no cases of crime in the area.

One of the many dangers facing the youth today, particularly in areas away from towns and cities, is the lack of sound entertainment and recreational facilities. It is with the youth in mind that the CWP has established an entertainment area, designed specifically to give them an alternative to the streets and damaging habits such as drug and alcohol abuse.



Giving young people a place to go will help to keep them away from dangerous criminal activities that can ruin their futures and damage the community.

A spinoff project in the pipeline through the BDF, which is now the local implementing agent for the CWP, that will benefit young people in Bokfontein, is a seven-hectare piece of land that is going to be transformed into an agricultural project.

Another project in the pipeline, which will have a positive economic impact on the community, is the rearing of poultry. Apart from providing meat and eggs, the poultry project will also produce readily available manure for a natural fertiliser for the vegetable gardens. Once running, the vegetables produced by the garden will then be sold to members of the community at affordable prices. The proceeds from this venture will be used to sustain the project.

While a large number of South Africans live in the area, Bokfontein is also a home to many people from the neighboring countries of Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. The community of Bokfontein has become a shining example of how people of completely different and diverse backgrounds can live in peace and harmony while working together – side by side – to achieve a common goal.

The xenophobic attacks of 2009, which resulted in the death of more than 50 mostly foreign nationals and drew worldwide attention, left an indelible scar that is yet to heal. While many communities throughout South Africa were caught up in the violence that flared up during this time, the Bokfontein community emerged unscathed. Though coming from different backgrounds, they have accepted and learned to live together through realising that they are one people striving for a common goal – a better life for themselves and their children. They are an example for the other divided communities in South Africa of how a nation can learn to tolerate and appreciate diversity.

This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government’s Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.