

Monitoring and Evaluation Unit



Department of Economic
Development
Umyango Wezokuthuthukiswa
Komnoto
KWAZULU - NATAL

LED Impact Assessment
Composite Report

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INDIVIDUAL PROJECT REPORTS

Umdoni LED Strategy

Mathenjwa Sewing Project

Ingwe Rail Project

Mpukunyoni Craft Market

Inqolobane Development foundation

Zululand LED Strategy

Bavelase Poultry Project

31 May 2007

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Independent centre for Learning on LED
through Monitoring and Research

Learning through Action, Monitoring and Evaluation!

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

DED - Department of Economic Development

KZN - KwaZulu-Natal

LED - Local Economic Development

LMRF - Learning, Monitoring and Research Facility

M&E - Monitoring & Evaluation

FOREWORD

We are pleased to present our maiden impact assessment reports of seven projects funded and implemented by the Local Economic Development (LED) Unit of the Department of Economic Development from 2003/2004 to 2005/2006 financial years. The purpose of evaluating these projects was to determine the extent to which they have achieved programme objectives and the impact they had in stimulating local economic development. This exercise was undertaken to draw learnings, identify best practices that could be replicated and worst practices that should be avoided in other similar projects.

The DED internal staff supported by Learning, Monitoring and Research Facility (LMRF) planned, implemented and managed the evaluation processes. Emerging researchers were engaged in evaluating the LED projects, as part of empowerment and grounding monitoring and evaluation. Emerging researchers were also capacitated with participatory research and evaluation skills and knowledge.

The global report, which highlights broad issues arising from evaluations, will hopefully assist in pinpointing areas where DED can improve its performance and contribute to the development of M&E tools and approaches for evaluation of LED projects. We believe that we have prepared evaluation reports that respond to the information needs of interested stakeholders and are easily accessible by those who have participated in the research project.

In conclusion, we express our gratitude to project beneficiaries who have allowed us to scrutinize and judge the performance of their projects. We are grateful to LED staff members who willingly shared valuable project information with us. We are humbled by collaboration and team approach exhibited by LMRF, M&E Unit and emerging researchers teams in implementing this project.

Sihle Mkhize

Senior Manager: Monitoring and Evaluation

31 May 2007



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This report provides an overview of some of the broader issues arising from the evaluation of the following Department of Economic Development LED related projects in KwaZulu-Natal:

- **Umdoni LED Strategy**
- **Mathenjwa Sewing Project**
- **Ingwe Rail Project**
- **Mpukunyoni Craft Market Feasibility Study**
- **Inqolobane Development Foundation**
- **Support to the Implementation of the Zululand LED strategy**
- **Bavelase Poultry project**

Many of these issues are alluded to in the specific project evaluation reports. However, there is a need to specifically highlight some of these issues, many of which are institutional or structural in nature and are not apparent at the project level.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Unit at the DED was recently established and one of its initial activities was to evaluate a number of previous projects undertaken by the DED. The M&E Unit and the Learning, Monitoring and Research Facility (LMRF) identified a number of Master students studying Planning or Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and provided them with training in monitoring and evaluation techniques and approaches. The students were teamed up with staff members from the M&E Unit and the LMRF and placed with different projects. DED and LMRF staff acted as mentors and provided guidance to the activities of the students. The M&E Unit's administrator supported the evaluation teams and the interns attached to the unit. The M&E Deputy Manager, supported by his Manager, took overall responsibility for managing this project.

Projects and mentors were allocated as follows:

Project	Student	Mentor
Mathenjwa Sewing Project		Bheki Nowele/Sihle Mkhize – DED
Inqolobane Community Development Foundation	Mpume Danisa	Tim Hadingham – LMRF
Bavelase Poultry	Mpume Danisa	Bheki Nowele – DED
Ingwe Rail	Bridget Katundu	Bheki Nowele – DED
Mpukunyoni Craft Market	Charles Sibanda	Tim Hadingham – LMRF
Umdoni LED Strategy	Bridget Katundu	Bheki Nowele – DED
Zululand LED Strategy Implementation	Siphephelo Chili	Tim Hadingham – LMRF

A more detailed description of each project is provided in the individual evaluation reports and will not be repeated here. The students prepared the evaluation reports after a series of interviews with key stakeholders, a participatory workshop with project beneficiaries and a feedback workshop with stakeholders and beneficiaries.

BROAD ISSUES ARISING FROM THE EVALUATIONS

This section describes some of the common themes that arose from interactions with stakeholders and project beneficiaries. In many cases these issues are perceptions of individuals and groups and relate to the role of the DED and its management of the projects. These views, while undoubtedly highlighting areas where the DED can improve its performance, do need to be balanced against the institutional and financial constraints under which the DED operates.

LACK OF CONTINUITY

The performance of many of the projects evaluated was affected at some stage by a lack of continuity. This usually took one or more of the following forms:

- Changes in political leadership in the DED
- Changes in key staff involved in the projects
- Changes of DED LED policy and approach.

Lack of continuity has created uncertainty among benefitting communities and as a result they are sceptical of the DED's ability to deliver on its promises. Beneficiaries acknowledge that delays and cancellations can and do occur as a result of events beyond the control of the DED and understand this. There is a general feeling that the reasons for delays and the impact of these events is inadequately communicated, and in some cases not communicated at all.

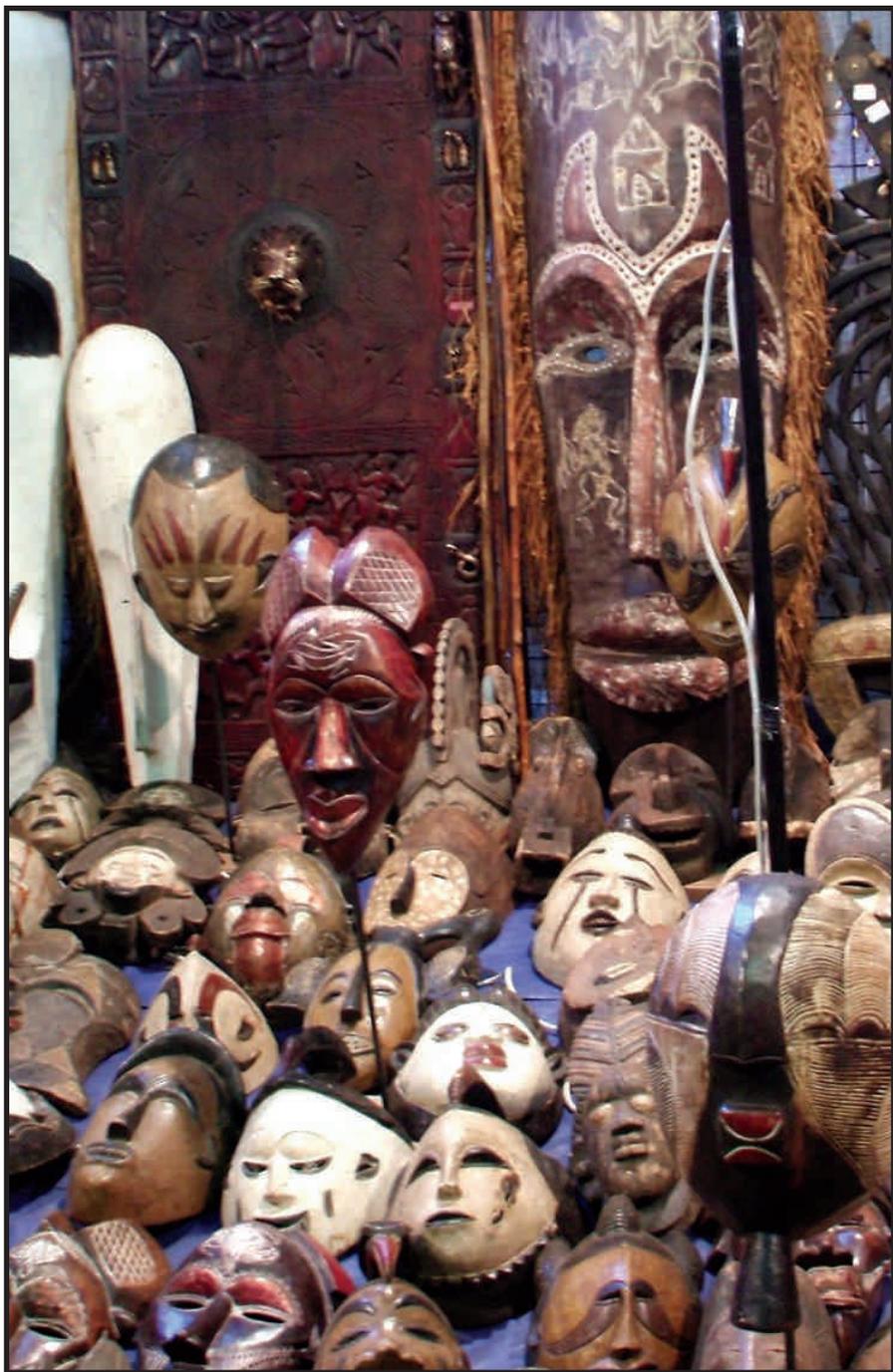
Lack of continuity resulting from the resignation of key DED staff seems to be as a result of project handover mechanisms being poorly implemented. Projects get forgotten about and are only taken up when the beneficiary community approaches the DED to find out what progress has been made. When projects are handed over to other DED staff member, they are inadequately briefed, which results in delays to project implementation due to the project officer having to "start from scratch".

PROBLEMS OF DOCUMENTATION

The issue of project documentation is related to the issue of lack of continuity with respect to DED project staff. In most cases, the students undertaking the evaluations had to approach the consultants or the beneficiary community to obtain project documentation. The information they managed to acquire was often not the latest version or incomplete. Although lack of availability of project documentation was particularly a problem where the project officer had left the DED entirely, it also occurred where staff had transferred between sections.

DED staff also referred evaluators to an archive of project documentation, only to discover that this archive contained little which was of use to their evaluation activities. In many cases, there were no records or documentation of any form relating to specific project activities.

Consequently, the evaluations had to rely heavily on the recollections of project officers and consultants. It should also be noted that consultants appear to be equally careless when it comes to maintaining project records and documentation.



LACK OF FOLLOW-UP

A number of the beneficiary communities expressed some frustration with the DED with regard to lack of implementation. They felt that DED project officers had stalled implementation in order to conduct the necessary feasibility studies and prepare the necessary business plans but were frustrated by the limited implementation resulting from these exercises.

This lack of follow up is partly due to issues around the lack of continuity discussed earlier, but it can also be attributed to limited medium term planning with respect to project activities. When feasibility studies are undertaken, the DED needs to be prepared to fund or assist with the sourcing of funding for implementation if the project is found to be feasible. Some of the beneficiary communities were concerned that so much time had elapsed since the original feasibility studies and business plans were done that they were outdated and would have to be redone delaying implementation even further.

COMMUNICATION WITH BENEFICIARIES

Constant and effective communication with project beneficiaries by DED staff seems to be very haphazard. In most instances project beneficiaries were not aware of the service provider's deliverables, which are contained in terms of reference compiled by the department. Progress meetings aimed at apprising beneficiaries about the project status and milestones already achieved are seldom organized by the department. The exit strategy of the department is not indicated and as a result project beneficiaries assume that the department has neglected the project whereas in reality the project has duly been closed by the department.

MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

There is room for improvement by the department in managing and monitoring service providers. It is suggested that on technical issues such as construction of buildings and structures, the department should solicit necessary support to supervise the service providers. Service providers should also ensure that skills are transferred effectively and communication with project beneficiaries is taking place. The setting up of the steering committee, which should include a project beneficiary representative to oversee the

work of the service provider, seems to be a sensible approach. In instances where a consultant has to provide training, it is important that training manuals are produced for quality assurance purposes and left with trainees as a point of future reference. Training in local economic development projects should be accompanied by mentoring and coaching of trainees. Service providers should submit training attendance registers and reports to the department, as part of their progress reports.

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

Some stakeholders and beneficiaries questioned the long-term sustainability of some of the projects. Stakeholders and beneficiaries indicated that the DED's approach to projects was problematic and contributed to the lack of sustainability and the failure of projects. The DED provided funding for consultants to run the projects and then stepped back from project processes. The DED only became visible again when the project had stalled or failed and it was time to wrap it up.

Partnerships between the DED and beneficiaries and the public sector tended to be poorly developed. The exception to this is the partnerships developed by the DED where the key partner was local government. This partnership formation is probably facilitated by the fact that provincial-local government relationships are governed by legislation and clear guidelines exist outlining what the two spheres of government can reasonably expect from each other.

The department can play a crucial role in terms of linking project beneficiaries with other stakeholders such as relevant government departments. This will greatly assist project beneficiaries to mobilise and leverage resources beyond the Department of Economic Development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many issues highlighted in previous discussion are somewhat harsh and do not paint a good picture of some of the LED projects funded by the DED. However, they are the perceptions of project beneficiaries and stakeholders desperate for implementation, and do need to be balanced against the financial and institutional constraints that the DED operates under. There are best practices that were identified during evaluation such as uMdoni and Ingwe Rail projects. It is important to note that some of the

recommendations suggested in this report are drawn from best practices identified from some of the evaluated projects.

It is clear that implementation has been limited and that the DED would like to see further progress in this regard. Some of the issues can be addressed through fairly simple interventions while others will require higher levels of buy in and institutionalisation within the DED.

Some interventions that need to be considered include:

- A document management system needs to be put in place. This can take the form of a document library or an archive. Hard and soft copy documents need to be held within this system and need to be referenced and searchable.
- The consultants need to provide at least three copies of all reports produced. These copies are to be distributed to the project manager, the library/archive centre and the M&E unit respectively.
- Formalised hand over processes should be put in place to ensure that the DED retains some institutional memory of the project. This could be included as part of an exit interview or could take the form of a separate briefing. All project documentation needs to be handed over to the new project officer at this point.
- A standardised project filing system needs to be put in place. Correspondence sent to and received from stakeholders and beneficiaries, progress reports and project reports should be captured by this system, as well as any information relevant to the project.
- Project design should include a communication plan and a clear exit strategy. The communication plan could include a social compact or memorandum of understanding between the DED and the beneficiary community that clearly states the rights and responsibilities of each group.
- Projects chosen for funding need to be located within a broader strategic LED framework that includes provisions for implementation if initial studies indicate that the project is feasible.
- Establishing a multi-skilled project steering committee for each and every project funded is a best practice that should be adopted by the department.
- Project management training, which includes terms of reference formulation and monitoring and service provider management should be arranged for all project managers.

