

Environment-friendly development: A partnership in energy provision

Introduction

Over the last few years NGOs and other special interest organisations have been working closely with government to find innovative and effective ways of improving the delivery of services to South Africans.

This move towards creating partnerships was the result of an honest assessment of the challenges facing service delivery in a country as vast as South Africa: many parts of the service delivery process are complex and dynamic; and the shortage of skills and capacity is a pervasive problem.

To encourage and support such partnerships, the Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) introduced the category 'Innovative Partnerships For Service Delivery' within its innovation awards programme. The Sustainable Energy for Environment and Development (SEED) programme received an award in 2004 in this category. The programme also won an Impumelelo Innovations award in 2003.

SEED focuses on the challenges of energy provision, particularly for poor households in urban areas. The government has consistently called for government-civil society partnerships that contribute towards sustainable development

and poverty alleviation in disadvantaged communities. On 21 May 2004, in his State of the Nation address, the President of South Africa noted the importance of co-operation between civil society and government and the government's commitment to consolidating the practice of partnerships between its structures and civil bodies.

This case study of SEED highlights the partnership experience between local government structures, an NGO called 'Sustainable Energy Africa' (SEA), and other non-governmental organisations. It is an example of a development partnership aimed at enhancing the functioning of local governments. The programme is targeted at municipalities and contributes to policies and practices on sustainable development and efficient energy use at various levels. It is hoped that the lessons presented in this case study will assist in developing new partnerships between government and NGOs, as well as strengthening existing ones.

This case study does more than show how partnerships work; it also shows how innovation can facilitate the sustainable use of scarce and expensive energy sources - a key issue for the majority of municipalities in South Africa. The SEED programme had an urban and a rural

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© Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) December 2004. This case is part of the innovation case programme for the CPSI. Through this case study programme, we wish to enhance innovation on the delivery of Public Services. The case study exposes a successful or award winning innovation or attempts to explore some aspect of the dynamic process on innovation. In some case, both these issues are covered.

component. Rural SEED was coordinated by the Energy and Development Research Unit (EDRC) of the University of Cape Town (to 2001) and urban SEED has been coordinated by SEA, and is ongoing (since 1998).

This case study covers only the urban component of the programme and therefore the term 'SEED' in this document, refers only to urban SEED.

Local and global concerns about energy

The democratic government that took power in 1994 faced two major tasks: addressing the poverty faced by the majority of black people and reducing the huge disparities in the way white and black South Africans lived. An important way in which these disparities were to be tackled was through providing housing and efficient energy. However, at the same time that the supply of energy to South Africans needed to widen, the concerns about energy and the environment were widening on a global scale. The first of these concerns is the earth's diminishing energy resources, and the second is the global warming created by the indiscriminate burning of fossil fuels and the deforestation of the earth.

As South Africa is a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and is committed to global efforts aimed at protecting the environment from damage, the big challenge for the government is to strike a balance between providing affordable services to poor households and complying with international and local obligations about protecting the environment.

In line with its commitment to redress, the government has put in place policies aimed at improving access to appropriate energy sources, promoting energy efficiency, and managing energy-related environmental and health effects. The 2002 White Paper on Renewable Energy highlights the need for developing renewable energy technologies, and the Integrated Energy Plan advocates the promotion of renewable energy as part of the country's energy supply.

The need to provide energy to the poor is a priority as part of sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Despite progressive energy policies, supply-driven implementation programmes have generally overlooked the developmental needs and priorities of the users. For example, it has been found that among low-income households, many electrified households continue to use a range of energy sources to meet their needs. In addition, inefficient energy use compounds poverty: housing without ceilings and a complete lack of accessible information to users on appropriate and efficient energy use condemn poor households to a future of high energy costs (a poor household will typically use between 20 and 25% of its income only just meeting its home energy costs).

The implementation of energy policies requires creative thinking and innovative strategies to ensure delivery of services to poor households. Sustainable Energy Africa (SEA), a non-governmental organisation that previously worked under the name Energy & Development Group (EDG), conceptualised, developed and still coordinates the SEED programme partnerships.

The SEED programme

SEED's primary task is to promote the integration of sustainable energy policies and practices into urban development in South Africa. The programme's establishment began as part of the Household Energy Action Training (HEAT) strategy on capacity building around rural and urban energy provision that was developed for and funded by the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME).

SEED is a national capacity-building programme that aims to integrate sustainable energy approaches and practices in urban development, through partnerships with local government and non-governmental organisations. Because of its strong emphasis on sustainability, the programme promotes an active awareness of the way in which various energy practices impact on the environment, the use of renewable and cleaner energy, as well as energy efficiency

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SEED is also focused on changing the dynamics and processes of energy-related work, moving away from a supply-led mode of provision by white male engineers to black development work that is demanded. Energy-related work now has a clear and explicit focus on the developmental needs of users, and involves men and women from various backgrounds.

The programme's key intervention is the placement of SEED advisors in the different partner organisations. SEED advisors are young black professionals and are identified by SEA and its municipal and NGO counterparts. Importantly, the municipal partners employ the advisors from the outset. SEA provides a salary for a period of time that varies according to the needs of, and agreements with, the different partners and offers training, ongoing support and advice to both the SEED advisors and their organisations, as well as providing funding to do demonstrations for communities on appropriate and efficient energy use.

According to one of the SEED advisors, a major strength of SEED's partnerships is that SEA makes a substantial financial contribution to the partnerships and does not expect government and NGO partners to provide all the finances.

Because the programme represents a paradigm shift in service provision, resistance to SEED work occurs, but this is managed with the support and mentorship of the SEED supervisors. Since the SEED programme cuts across departments and portfolios, advisors require a lot of support in working within the structures of the organisation.

The different partnerships

The cornerstone of the SEED programme is the partnerships it forges between SEA, local government, and NGOs involved in development work. Because of the pioneering nature of the work, the central issue of sustainability, and the need for creativity and innovativeness for the programme to be implemented successfully, all partners selected have to be strong in themselves and have solid administrative systems. In the local government-SEED partnership, a senior

supervisor to act as a mentor for the SEED advisor was identified. This person would champion the advisor's work, and provide effective leadership. The role of champions was threefold, therefore: to support the SEED advisors; to teach them how to work within the system in ways that would maximise their effectiveness; and to promote the infusion of SEED ideas into the advisors' organisations.

While champions generally are key leaders within organisations and in the community, they also have high levels of commitment to communities and to the preservation of the environment in terms of delivering on promises. Ideally, each municipal partner is partnered with a suitable NGO and the SEED advisors placed in these structures support and participate closely in one another's work.

Phase One of the SEED programme was implemented in three municipalities (metros), which were identified as having a strong drive to provide houses and electrification as part of their poverty-alleviation strategy. The use of three metros in Phase One allowed for a cross-fertilisation of ideas and strategies and provided useful lessons on working with partners who have different needs and resources. The three metros selected were the City of Cape Town and the Development Action Group (DAG); Durban Metro Housing and the Built Environment Support Group (BESG); and Midrand Eco-City (which subsequently became part of the Johannesburg metro) and the Greenhouse Project. The partners' task was to provide a post that could be located within an appropriate department (this was different for each partner) for a SEED advisor. The advisors' job descriptions, developed by SEA and the partner together, allowed them to focus on SEED work.

Since then, more partnerships have been established. Phase Two of the programme includes ongoing partnerships with the City of Cape Town, DAG, the City of Joburg, the South African Local Government Association, the national departments of Housing, Minerals and Energy, and Environment and Tourism, as well as new partnerships with the City of Tshwane, Sol Plaatje Municipality, and the Ekurhuleni Metro.

While SEA pays the salary of advisors for the agreed-upon period, as well as training and support costs, the metro and NGO partners pay for the running costs of the posts themselves. SEA also supplies demonstration funds for the advisors. The partners commit themselves to taking on the full costs of the SEED post after an agreed-upon interval and, where possible, converting the post into a permanent one within their organisation. As an example, Durban's eThekweni Housing Unit continues to employ its advisor from Phase One.

Because of changes and career mobility within organisations, SEA is also committed to developing and nurturing relationships in various departments within municipalities and metros and NGO partner organisations. The demonstrated usefulness and practicability of the programme during Phase One has secured ongoing support for SEED ideas and has allowed these ideas to become a central factor of the organisation's functioning.

Functions of the SEED advisors

The advisors represent the face of SEED in the places where they are located. They are responsible for implementing the various aspects of the programme. According to one of these advisors, understanding how local authorities function is necessary for advisors to work effectively, and, without the support and mentorship of political and technical champions, his own work would have been much more difficult.

SEED advisors work with the organisation, training officials in the housing and energy departments about efficient energy use, as well as the community each one serves. To this end, SEA provides each advisor with funds for demonstration projects. This can take many forms: demonstration houses, exhibits, or demonstration centres where people can be taught about appropriate and efficient energy use. In this way, advisors are able to reach poor communities and communicate their message to those who are not easily reached through the usual channels.

Innovative programme implementation

Recognising that poor households spend a high percentage of their income on energy, Phase One of the SEED Programme (1998-2001) focused on poverty alleviation by promoting more efficient energy use within these communities, as well as access to better energy sources. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), with a strong drive towards providing housing for low-income earners, provided an excellent opportunity to implement SEED work around housing.

The programme has implemented a number of innovative strategies to raise awareness about energy and energy-related issues. SEED uses an interactive and multi-pronged approach to training and learning. Apart from the demonstration projects and centres that are funded by the programme and undertaken by the SEED partners, advisors also work with communities. Youth groups - with SEED advisors promoting and supporting their activities - are mobilised as energy activists tasked with raising awareness in the community on energy and related issues.

The SEED advisor in the Cape Town Metro has implemented a pilot Cleaner Development Mechanism Project with SouthSouthNorth (SSN), an international body that is assisting South countries with the Clean Development Mechanism in Khayelitsha: 10 houses in Kuyasa, built under the Reconstruction and Development Programme, have been fitted with ceilings, solar water heaters and energy efficient lighting to reduce carbon emissions, reduce costs of services to householders, and provide an improved level of service. SSN aims to use this project to sell carbon credits to a rollout of 2500 houses, hopefully paving the way for many similar projects around the country.

The SEED advisor working in DAG built a demonstration house in one of the organisation's community projects. Subsequently, 75% of micro loans for new house owners were for ceilings and for weatherproofing. SEED has, through the foundations it built in Phase One, been able to move on in its second phase, to

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working on whole city energy strategies: Cape Town has committed to 10% renewable energy supply by 2020 and 10% solar water heaters by 2010.

Funding for SEED

Phase One of the SEED programme was funded by DANCED, the Danish environmental funding agency whose primary focus was environmental sustainability and the development of poor communities. DANCED was closed down by the Danish Government in 2001 and all its projects incorporated under DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency), which funds Phase Two of SEED. Through partnership agreements, the SEED partners are required to provide complementary support funding to the funds provided by SEED. The funds are spent on training the SEED advisors, on advocacy, and on the payment of the SEED advisors' salaries.

Distinguishing features of SEED partnerships

A holistic approach: Development is viewed in a holistic way. Energy provision begins with an understanding of the earth's energy system and how energy use affects this. The SEED programme, as a result, promotes a demand-led approach that begins with understanding user needs and fitting supply to these needs, rather than the other way around.

Solid understanding of sustainable development: This not only relates to environmental concerns, but is also explicit in the way both the partnerships with metros and the programme are conceptualised and structured. SEA does not encourage dependency, but provides ongoing support that ensures that partners take full ownership of projects and continue the work on their own. The partnership is adapted or terminated as the needs of the organisation evolve.

Enhancing the work of partner organisations: SEA offers both its government and NGO partners an intervention that is designed to enhance their work and enable them to reach their objectives. Partnerships work best where there is a clear understanding of the objectives, policies, and functions of all parties. For this reason, SEA offers a partnership

intervention that does not clash with day-to-day organisational functioning. The value of the SEED programme will become increasingly evident when partners involved in Phase One start taking much greater responsibility for funding Phase Two of the programme (2001-2005) and integrating SEED into their organisational structures.

Technical expertise: SEA has sound technical knowledge in the area of energy provision and development, as well as the resources and skills that enable it to manage emerging issues on the intervention. SEA staff members, collectively and individually, have been engaged in energy work and political activism for decades and are able to use their experiences to enrich the programme.

What is more, networks developed during the years of struggle against apartheid have contributed significantly to the success of the programme. For example, SEED advisors are able to call on experts from other organisations, when they need to, to support their presentations to Parliament's portfolio committees.

Capacity building and training within partnership structures

A big issue in energy and development work is the lack of expertise in translating the ideals of sustainable energy policies into practical implementation strategies. This is why a significant aspect of the SEED programme is training, in which all the partners are involved both as learners and teachers. The most beneficial part of the training is the content and the methodology of the training. Because of the gender inequalities that show up frequently in various aspects of energy work, for example, both the primary SEA staff members as well as the trainers were included in the training on gender-related issues.

The training situates the SEED programme firmly within a comprehensive framework of development work. Giving SEED a developmental context means there is a solid base from which innovative and creative work can emerge.

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The content of the training and the mutual learning honour and respect all forms of knowledge. Because SEED work is informed by an understanding of the dynamics of different communities, any resistances to the programme can be understood contextually and worked with in appropriate ways.

Experiential training methods, based on scientifically sound principles, are used. There is a strong focus on developing advisors' critical thinking skills so that they are able to analyse and resolve emerging problems more efficiently. SEED advisors use these techniques to capacitate and pass on skills to the various groups they train.

The training is ongoing, with partners having bi-annual, one-week training/networking sessions. Feedback from the work is used creatively to inform the programme and make adjustments where these are required.

In addition to training, SEA has published a very user-friendly book that explains energy-related issues in simple terms that are accessible to ordinary people.

SEED advisors also develop the presentation and communication skills of their colleagues in their partner organisations.

SEED's achievements

SEED has contributed significantly to energy policies and practices at both local and national government level.

- SEED often makes presentations to parliamentary portfolio committees and, as part of capacity building, SEED advisors often perform this task.
- SEED ideas are implicit and explicit in the White Paper on Renewable Energy.
- SEED has been instrumental in assisting local governments develop their energy strategy plans; for example, the draft Cape Town Energy Strategy (2003), as well as information and training manuals such as *Energyising South African Cities & Towns: A Local Government Guide to Sustainable Energy Planning* (2003).
- The City of Cape Town's Energy Strategy received accolades at the Bonn Renewables Conference in 2004, as a lead example for South countries.
- All South African cities are now committed to sustainable energy. This has also been facilitated by the increased global focus on energy issues, as well as the twinning of South African cities with northern cities that are invested in sustainable energy.
- SEED has enhanced the work of local governments and helped partners to deliver on their mandate, and be seen to be doing so.
- SEED ideas have become infused into the functioning of the partners involved in Phase One and now constitute a core function of the organisation. The Cape Town Metro, for example, now has an energy post on their organogram and is committed to managing and using energy resources more efficiently and to introducing renewable energy into their own operations.
- The infusion of SEED into institutional practices has resulted in the programme surviving beyond personalities. This means that the loss of champions in partner organisations has not resulted in the programme collapsing.
- Because of the success of Phase One, more local authorities have come on board in Phase Two, with most of these becoming more proactive and approaching SEED for partnership. Local governments involved in Phase Two include Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, South Africa Local Government Association, Sol Plaatjie, with strong relationships being built with the South African Cities Network, Buffalo City, Saldahna, and Potchefstroom.
- New SEED projects are developing all the time and, in each one, local partnerships and conditions inform the shape of the project. For example, a major new project is to develop Sol Plaatjie as the first solar city in Africa.
- All SEED advisors and champions who have moved to new and often more senior positions in other organisations continue to promote SEED ideas in their new jobs and are often in charge of people who have taken over the on-the-ground implementation work.

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- SEED has contributed significantly to delivery being measured not only by quantity, but by quality and sustainability, as well.
- SEED has contributed to a number of publications that make energy work and related issues more accessible to lay people. SEA co-hosted the City Energy Strategies Conference in November 2003 and is planning a follow-up conference in 2006. Two business and energy conferences will be held in 2005 to promote business partnering with local government in promoting a sustainable energy future. SEED has also produced a number of its own publications (see box text)

SEED Publications:

- Ward, S and Mahomed, L (2003) Energising South African Cities: A Local Government Guide to Sustainable Energy Planning.
- Cape Town State of Energy Report (2003).
- Cape Town Energy Strategy – draft (2003).
- Ward, S. (2002). The Energy Book for Urban Development in South Africa.
- SEED Updates – biannual magazine since 1999
- Regular eSEED Newsletter.
- Energy Use in the Home – Soul City booklet (distribution of 1 million copies).

The challenges facing SEED

- Because of the importance of having a champion in local government for SEED work to proceed more constructively and smoothly, institutional changes such as the loss of champions when they move and the task of nurturing new relationships are ongoing challenges, but they have not resulted in the programme being disrupted.
- Because SEED is new and represents an innovative approach to energy and related services, management support is crucial. Poor management has resulted in contracts with one NGO and one local authority not being renewed.

- The junior level at which SEED advisors are placed within organisations makes it difficult for them to participate at a strategic level in the organisation. A senior supervisor champion makes all the difference. However, while the junior position makes work difficult, it also enables the advisor to learn the workings of the organisation from the bottom up, and to interface more easily with officials and community.
- There needs to be a change in the gender and racial profile of energy workers - all the SEED advisors are black and, over the years, about 40% have been women.

Lessons learnt

There is a need to garner an in-depth understanding of the functioning of the partner organisation, so as to be able to determine the best entry point for an intervention. It is also important to build a relationship of mutual trust with government partners.

Building capacity within the partnerships is essential so that the partner organisations can take ownership of processes and carry on the work themselves. While partnership with the government is useful for getting sponsors for non-governmental organisations, independence must be promoted. By building strong foundations advisors are always able to hand over and move on to the next challenge. There is always another challenge to be taken up.

It is crucial to build and support champions who believe in and are committed to the ideals and objectives of the intervention being offered, particularly within government bureaucracies.

There is a need for ongoing critical engagement with partners and sufficient flexibility to allow for growth and integration of new material into the programme. Knowing when to terminate a partnership that is not working is essential.

Case study

Abbreviations

BESG	Built Environment Support Group
DME	Department of Minerals and Energy
DAG	Development Action Group
DANCED	The Danish Environmental Assistance Programme now disbanded and absorbed into DANIDA
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EDG	Energy & Development Group
HEAT	Household Energy Action Training
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SEA	Sustainable Energy Africa
SEED	Sustainable Energy for Environment and Development

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- Ward, S and Mahomed, L, (2003) Energising South African Cities: A Local Government Guide to Sustainable Energy Planning.
- Cape Town State of Energy Report (2003).
- Cape Town Energy Strategy - draft (2003).
- SEED Updates - biannual magazine since 1999.
- Regular eSEED Newsletter.
- Energy Use in the Home - Soul City booklet (distribution of 1 million copies).
- SEA (2001) The urban SEED (Phase 1) project - November 1998 to October 2001 - Completion Report, Sustainable Energy Africa.



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