

case study

Maintaining Rural Roads through Job Creation Healing the fabric of society

Introduction

Internationally, two major developments have occurred in the last couple of decades that require government agencies to look more closely at the need for partnerships in meeting their service delivery objectives. Firstly, there is the greater level of specialisation that changes in technology and the structure of the economy have brought about and, secondly, government departments all over the world are realising the importance of establishing partnerships with communities and beneficiaries of service delivery. Government departments are increasingly recognising that without the active involvement of community structures, it is unlikely that even the best-intentioned interventions will make any sustained impact on the lives of citizens.

To support and encourage partnerships that can result in higher levels of service delivery, the CPSI has created a category called 'Innovative Partnerships for Service Delivery' as part of its innovation awards programme. The Zibambele Road Maintenance System in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa received an award in this category in 2004. The Zibambele project has also received a number of other important awards, including an award for the most out-

standing innovative project dedicated to poverty relief from the Impumelelo Innovations Award Trust in 2000.

This case study highlights the partnerships between a provincial government department, namely the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport, on the one hand, and a number of community-based structures, in this instance the Rural Road Transport Forums and Savings Clubs, on the other.

With the increasing importance of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in South Africa, the case study will also explore the experiences of Zibambele in implementing public works programmes to a scale that will make meaningful impacts on intended beneficiaries.

The case study will describe the development, implementation and achievements of the programme, tracing the central role that partnership with traditional communities has played in all stages of the process. It will further point to the potential of partnerships for harnessing both public and private sector resources in addressing community needs in comprehensive, collaborative and creative ways. In addition, the study highlights the many challenges faced in a programme of this scope. The lessons of this model

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should be of particular interest to those government structures tasked with the challenge of poverty alleviation and job creation, especially in rural areas.

Zibambele described

Zibambele Road Maintenance System is the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport 's flagship poverty-alleviation programme. It is a form of labour-intensive road maintenance in which a household is contracted to maintain a specific length of rural road. It was designed to be both cost efficient and provide sustainable contract opportunities to destitute families, especially women-headed households. This public works programme has grown to reach a significant number of rural poor, and in so doing has also improved the access rural communities have to infrastructure and resources. In addition to awards in the CPSI and Impumelelo award programmes, Thabo Mbeki highlighted the effectiveness of the programme in 2003 as a best practice public works programme that should be duplicated. The Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga provinces have begun to replicate the programme as part of their poverty relief initiatives.

The urgent need to create jobs and address poverty is acutely felt in KwaZulu-Natal, especially in rural areas, home to 75% or more than two million of the poorest people in the province. Another feature of poverty in the province is the strong correlation between deep poverty and women-headed households, both as a result of the colonial history of migrant labour, and the decades of civil conflict in the province.

Already in 1996, in the wake of a Roads Needs Assessment, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport (DoT) initiated the regional Rural Road Transport Forums. These structures were intended to advance participatory democracy by consulting communities in decision-making processes for the prioritisation of road access needs, and to facilitate the economic participation and development of the previously disadvantaged in the road construction industry.

The Zibambele Road Maintenance System (Zibambele) was first tabled in October 1998 at a job summit, as part of the Road to Wealth and Job Creation think tank of the provincial department of transport. It was envisaged as an initiative to create extensive job and entrepreneurial opportunities and address the apartheid legacy of hopelessly inadequate road access for rural communities, at the same time

Zibambele (Zulu for 'doing it for ourselves') was launched by the MEC for Transport in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in January 2000. It is an adaptation of the Kenyan Lengthman Contract System for routine maintenance of road infrastructure by labour-intensive methods and, as such, is a classic public works programme.

The programme aims to fill a gap in the social security net for the extremely poor, by creating meaningful and sustainable job opportunities for the long-term unemployed. The aims are specifically:

- To provide ongoing and sustainable work for destitute households in an effort to break their poverty cycles;
- To provide cost-effective and labour-intensive methods for routine maintenance of the KZN provincial road network; and
- To empower rural women by providing training in road maintenance and other life skills programmes.

Initially roads to be maintained are identified in consultation with local Rural Road Transport Forums (RRTF). These forums, which serve as 'the eyes and ears of the community', are democratically elected by the people living within the boundaries of each regional RRTF area. They are representative of all rural stakeholders (traditional leaders, business, district and municipalities, public transport, farmers) and community-based organisations (youth and women). The RRTF receive ongoing training in a programme designed to build their capacity to represent communities in consultations with the DoT.

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Once suitable roads have been identified by the RRTF together with the DoT, a meeting is held with the community and the local leadership to discuss the selection of beneficiaries. This ensures that the most needy are indeed targeted. Zibambele has actively targeted women-headed households that are extremely poor and that live in close proximity to the section of road to be maintained. Initial contracts are for 12 months, renewable annually, provided the road being maintained is still of value to the community, needs to be maintained, and the household still is in need (with an income of less than R1050 per month). Where necessary, new contractors are assisted to obtain identity documents and open bank accounts

Each contractor is provided with the necessary equipment, which includes a wheelbarrow, pick, shovel, machete, slasher and hoe; as well as safety gear and two plastic cones. Each works a maximum of 60 hours per month, giving the contractor enough time to engage in other income-generating and household activities. They currently earn R370 per month. The average length of road maintained by each contractor is currently 500m to 800m, depending on the terrain. Tasks involve clearing and keeping clear drains, culverts and pipes; removing foliage and other debris and litter to designated removal sites; fixing potholes and other effects of erosion; and keeping road signs clear and clean.

The daily supervision of Zibambele contractors is done by departmental officials who are either roadworks foremen or auxiliary services officers, trained by the DoT. They meet with contractors at least once a month, and also submit monthly reports on the performance of each contractor. The administration of contracts and payments has been decentralised to regional offices and their local cost centres, but overall responsibility for setting policy and implementation guidelines for managing the programme rests with the Development Directorate at Head Office.

The project is totally funded by the government, using funds allocated to the KZN Department of Transport annual budget. In addition, the DoT works closely with both technical and social consultants who have been contracted by the DoT to give support to the

programme. While the DoT has, since 2001, taken on the overall management of Zibambele, the social consultants of CORD Consulting, who have a long history of community development work, are still closely involved in various aspects of the programme, including the selection of contractors, and the supervision, establishment, and training of the Savings Clubs.

The Zibambele contractors have been organised into Savings Clubs (SCs) of up to 50 members, to develop systems of group supervision, training and peer review, as well as to provide a reciprocal communication channel with the DoT. A constitution has also been compiled in consultation with contractors to guide the organisation of the SCs, which meet monthly, under the supervision of the social consultants. In August 2003 the Zibambele training programme was launched, which is to be administered through the SCs. To date the SCs have collectively accumulated around R700 000 in savings, and clearly have the potential to serve as important vehicles for economic empowerment of rural communities.

For this reason, the DoT is in the process of consultations with possible partners for developing this resource. To date the Departments of Home Affairs and Social Development are involved in assisting Zibambele contractors to obtain ID documents and social grants; and there are plans to bring the Department of Agriculture on board to tackle issues like food security, water supplies, and irrigation systems. Similarly, the Department of Health could work through the SCs to facilitate the rollout of antiretroviral and TB treatment, as well as the training of home-based carers. Preliminary discussions are currently underway with the SA Co-operatives Movement as well as with commercial banks for exploring the potential for partnerships in the appropriate investment of SC members' savings.

Moreover, it is envisaged that businesses might enter into partnerships with SCs in developing further income-generating undertakings.

Outcomes of Zibambele

The Zibambele Road Maintenance System has developed into a *large-scale poverty-alleviation programme*. Although no benchmark indicators were established before the programme was introduced, both the extent and impact of Zibambele bear testimony to its effectiveness. It is significant to note the rate at which the programme has expanded, as this demonstrates the pressing need among the rural poor for the paid employment that the project supplies. In 2001/2002 a total of 9 856 contracts were awarded, out of the 10 000 targeted. By the end of the 2002/2003 financial year this had grown to 14 825 contractors. Currently, there are more than 24 000 contractors who maintain about 11 000 kilometres of rural road annually. The programme aims to employ 40 000 contractors and cover some 17 000 kilometres of road by 2009, which is intended to contribute to stabilising the poverty of the estimated 500 000 destitute in rural KZN. This is clearly the scale of intervention needed to make any significant impact on poverty in rural households and communities.

At the core of the programme has been a *close collaboration* with both traditional authorities and communities, as well as private sector agencies. In this way 31 Rural Roads Transport Forums have been established, which cover all regions of the province, ensuring local participation and support from grassroots level. Also, the DoT has from the beginning of the programme worked closely with both technical and social support consultancies from the private sector. In addition, about 440 Savings Clubs have been established, which have already begun to implement savings as well as create further income-generating projects. As described above, the SCs hold exciting prospects for breaking the cycle of poverty and enhancing the quality of life of rural families, through their partnerships in service delivery with other provincial government departments and in the future, possibly, with the private sector too.

A central achievement of Zibambele is that it has *successfully targeted the poorest of the poor*, so that of the over 20 000 contracts awarded thus far, all

have gone to households without any other significant source of income, and over 95% have gone to women-headed households. In this regard, another impressive feature of the project is that although rural KZN communities are often considered to be strongly patriarchal, this project has boldly targeted women, and has been able to mobilise support for this from amaKhosi and other rural leadership structures.

A number of external evaluations have been conducted to investigate both the impact and effectiveness of the project. In 2002 the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit at Cape Town University was contracted to conduct a *cost-effectiveness and impact analysis* of Zibambele. The study found that the programme offered a highly cost-effective public works model in terms of the creation of employment and the transfer of resources to participants. Thus, for the 2004/5 financial year, 95% of the total R76million budget is being spent on contractors' wages. The study also found that the Zibambele's performance compared favourably with other poverty-alleviation programmes both locally and internationally. Moreover, the model appears to be cost comparable with conventional capital-intensive methods for road maintenance. However, the report found that the effectiveness of poverty alleviation afforded by Zibambele still needed to be determined.

A *social impact* study has also been conducted, which indicates considerable satisfaction with the programme, and that the programme has allowed many household heads to meet pressing basic needs, such as nutrition, health care, and schooling. Thus, findings indicate that 99% of participants considered the selection process for contractors fair or very fair; 96% felt that life had changed because of the programme; 94% were proud to work for Zibambele; 81% thought that the project had improved their quality of life. Many also expressed increased optimism for the future as a result of working for Zibambele, and saw it as restoring the human dignity of households, 'healing the fabric of society'.

Challenges and lessons

The Zibambele programme, with its aim to create sustainable job opportunities for poor rural families through the maintenance of rural roads, highlights a number of critical concerns for initiatives of this nature and magnitude. The two features of the programme that stand out as essential to its effectiveness, and are woven throughout the case study, are the need for such expanded public works programmes to be of sufficient scale to make a meaningful impact, and the critical importance of partnerships across sectors to maximise effectiveness of the initiative.

Firstly then, a central feature of this type of project, which was identified by all stakeholders, was the imperative to *implement the programme to scale*. There was strong consensus that in order for such a form of public works programme to be meaningful as a strategy to alleviate poverty and generate sustainable job opportunities, it needed to become a large-scale, province-wide programme, which was intended to reach significant numbers of the poorest in rural communities. Anything less than this would merely exacerbate piecemeal and fragmented service delivery and further entrench poverty cycles. This has been the goal of Zibambele from the outset, and it continues to exceed its annual targets in this regard. Significant is the fact that road works in this province, unlike in the rest of the country, are consolidated under one department, which hugely facilitates implementation.

An obvious implication of this bold scale of implementation is the heavy *demand on resources* for effective and efficient management. Unless sufficient resources, both human and financial, are made available to such a programme, its success will inevitably be compromised. Already, Zibambele shows signs of feeling this pinch, with some contractor supervisors being expected to supervise over 200 contractors monthly.

This requirement relates to another key feature of the success of Zibambele that was stressed by stakeholders, namely the *importance of having strong and com-*

mitted political will behind the programme.

This is needed to ensure the sustainability of the programme, through establishing the necessary support at the highest levels of government, in order to motivate for budget and staffing on an appropriate scale. Such commitment has been a central component of the successful implementation of Zibambele in KZN

A question that needs to be raised regarding the initiation of a road maintenance and poverty-alleviation programme like Zibambele is whether such a programme is appropriately located within a government department. An alternative argument would be that it would be more suitably managed by a non-governmental organisation. However, those involved in Zibambele contend that in order to ensure sustainability at the required scale, this type of public works *programme is indeed best implemented by government*. In addition, government needs to be seen to be carrying out its mandate of service delivery, especially to the most needy.

This brings us to the second central feature of such a public works programme, namely the need for *partnerships*. Although government was regarded as the most appropriate driver of the programme, it is clear that partnerships are a crucial part of the success of the undertaking. In this regard, Zibambele has from the outset worked extremely closely with both community structures and private sector agencies. On the one hand, the RRTF were key to initiating the programme, and continue to play a central role in maintaining community support and government accountability – identifying the needs of the community, ascertaining whom to target for the intervention, negotiating access and buy-in from relevant community bodies, establishing communication channels for ongoing dialogue and feedback between parties, training and skills development, and early identification and resolution of problems. On the other hand, private sector social and technical consultancies played a significant role in conceptualising and getting the programme off the ground. They are strongly committed to ongoing skills training and development within the DoT, the RRTF and the Savings Clubs, and their specialist expertise remains a valuable component of the programme.

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Given that the Zibambele programme is now well established, an *emerging priority* is that of developing partnerships with agencies that will be able to consolidate and enhance the functioning of the SCs, as described above. If meaningful economic empowerment of contractors is to occur, they will need the financial resources and entrepreneurial skills to establish sustainable businesses. It is in these fields that private sector and civil society agencies will be able to play a role in collaborating creatively with the provincial DoT

However, such partnerships also throw up inevitable *challenges to programme implementation*. For example, the extensive network of RRTF relies largely on volunteer participation, which obviously renders it vulnerable to loss of experienced members. This raises challenges; for example, how should such structures be conceptualised? The involvement of private consultancies may also bring about conflicts related to different salary structures, and this poses questions about whether such involvement should be regarded as ongoing, or temporary and linked to the development of suitable competencies among public sector staff. In addition, the use of SCs as possible vehicles to deliver other social services to communities may generate confusion among beneficiaries about the role of different service providers, as well as possible competition/overlap between public and private agencies. Continuous review of activities, and openness and flexibility are clearly needed to juggle the range of expectations and implications of working with a range of community, public, and private partners.

Another concern about the road maintenance model of job creation has been whether these are in fact *'notional jobs'*, which do not significantly reduce the actual road maintenance load and, furthermore, do not lead to the development of entrepreneurial opportunities. Those involved with Zibambele would argue that the programme needs to be seen holistically, alongside the other DoT initiatives; for example *Vukuzakhe*, the emerging contractor programme designed to prepare contractors, through training, mentorship and other support, for competing on the open market for short-term road construction

contracts. Zibambele, on the other hand, is intended to provide long-term employment through ongoing maintenance work. In addition Zibambele is intended to eliminate middleman entrepreneurs who may exploit maintenance workers for profit. Thus there is the need for both types of programmes, each addressing different social and economic priorities.

A number of further issues were identified as important in the success of Zibambele. Chief amongst these was *the need for a targeted approach to implementation*. Managers of the programme stressed that there must be clarity about who the intended beneficiaries of the programme should be, and that in the case of Zibambele there was strong consensus that rural, impoverished women-headed households were to be targeted. This was a challenging commitment to fulfil, as rural communities in the province are regarded as strongly patriarchal and traditional. Extensive consultation through appropriate community structures ensured substantial support at grassroots level, and the awarding of over 95% of contracts to women. This also appears to have minimised the occurrence of corruption and competition in the awarding of contracts. Anecdotal accounts of identified contractors giving up their contracts in favour of more needy households bear moving testimony to this.

However, the targeting of women for employment in the project has not been carried through to other levels; over 90% of the contractor supervisors are men. While this is understandable, as the road industry has traditionally been dominated by men, there is a need to create job opportunities for women at this level too, which would also allow for greater understanding of the concerns of women contractors. Thus the *implications of targeting* a particular sector need to be considered, so that career pathing is possible and the concerns of the sector are represented at every level.

A strong feature of Zibambele has been the attention paid to the *development of clear, detailed guidelines for the implementation and management* of the programme. These guidelines were developed in close consultation with contractors and the RRTF,

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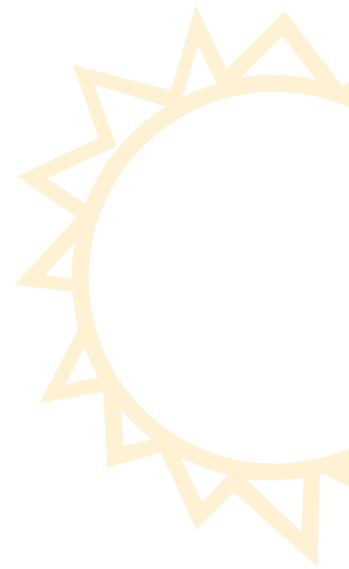
and have been revised to accommodate developments in the programme. They serve as essential tools in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of Zibambebe, and allow for the necessary checks and controls in a programme of such large scope. As a result of this, there seems to have been very few incidents of corruption in the programme thus far. The guidelines are also used in the training of supervisors and contractors.

The management of Zibambebe considers the *model to be strongly replicable*, not just with regard to road maintenance, but across a range of public service, and even private sector, contexts. So, with proper attention to targeting, for example, of youth, unemployed men, and pensioners, public assets like schools, clinics, and streets could be mobilised as sites of job creation and poverty relief. The business sector could also enter into partnerships for job creation in labour-intensive undertakings. What is needed, however, in any enterprise of this nature is the capacity to manage the programme effectively.

A further important ingredient in the successful implementation of job-creation and poverty-alleviation programmes is the need for benchmark community surveys at the outset, as well as *ongoing internal and external monitoring and evaluation*, in order that programme impact can be tracked effectively. The absence of the establishment of benchmark indicators before Zibambebe was initiated meant that it has been difficult to measure the impact of the programme accurately. Subsequently, external evaluations have been commissioned, and these provide valuable feedback on the progress of the programme and the areas needing further investigation. Regular ongoing monitoring will enhance the overall planning and management of Zibambebe.

In conclusion, it remains important in a programme like Zibambebe to keep in the foreground *the vision that drives such undertakings*. The focus on community renewal and alleviation of poverty requires a holistic approach, one that provides not only technical solutions to social problems, but that needs dedicated commitment from those who drive it, willingness to engage in participatory processes with

communities, and a recognition of the convergence between the political and civil society concerns that are involved in implementation.



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Abbreviations

CPSI	Centre for Public Service Innovation
DoT	Department of Transport
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
RRTF	Rural Roads Transport Forums
SC	Savings Club

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- KZN DoT Annual Report 2003/4;
- KZN DoT Strategic Plan 2004/5 to 2006/7;
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