

“Sustainable Development” - A South African Perspective

To develop and implement “Sustainable Development” in South Africa, we need to take a look at basic fundamental needs of the majority of its inhabitants

More than 35% of South Africans live in shacks constructed using anything from zinc, wood, plastic, trees and combinations thereof, and do not have access to electricity and clean running water.

Ever noticed the yellow smoke around Johannesburg in winter after 4:30 in the afternoon? This is the result of cold living conditions. A “konka” (normally a old paint tin with holes punched into it) filled with coal or wood, is lit to provide some heat during the night in this substandard dwelling. Ever seen woman and children walk kilometres with bundles of branches on their heads? One, the trees near their shacks have already been chopped down and two, they most probably do not have the money to buy coal. Are trees chopped down only to be sold for money to buy coal? As an alternative to fight off the cold in the shack during the night, they have no option but to rely on trees to generate heat. Why? There are no heat conservation properties in a shack and anything that can generate heat will be used to try and keep warm. There goes the basis of the “green people” to conserve our natural green heritage. How do you tell people who suffer from cold, not to chop down trees, because the worlds Ozone layer will be destroyed and it will result in “Global Warming”. Heat is exactly what they need! Ironic?

Fluctuation in temperatures in these shacks leads to continuous colds and flu and the inhabitants are all exposed to carbon monoxide poisoning resulting in respiratory disease. Ultimately these people need to go to hospital for treatment and we all know what has happened to our Health and Welfare Departments countrywide. They spend their budget fighting the problem and not the cause.

Many illnesses, disease and deaths can be blamed on shortage or lack of clean running water to each household (or should it be “shack hold”)

Many illnesses, disease and deaths can be blamed on the shortage or lack of clean running water to each household (or should it be “shack hold”). I met with Dr. Patrick Maduna in Nelspruit some years ago and will never forget what he told me. ” The basic solution to all the patients that come into my surgery to be treated for diarrhoea, would be prevention, and prevention is as simple as washing hands, not an expensive tablet”.

How many seasons have passed with flooding occurring in the Western Cape each year? How many times have we seen shack fires claim lives? What is done to prevent this from re occurring? Imagine seeing all your possessions go up in flames? Imagine the tunnel of frustration experienced by these shack dwellers? Never ending!

The above scenario proves that the root of the problem is not addressed and that the focus is on “putting out fires”. Why is it not possible for different Ministerial Departments or even Regional Departments, as they are more aware of their community needs, to look at the various problems facing our country and regions collectively and formulate a plan of action to address the critical problems holistically, with pooled resources saving time and money, brining about much needed change? Is this not a common practice for corporate institutions to address critical issues in this manner?

Housing remains a primary sector of industry that can contribute towards the social upliftment and empowerment of communities and well being of all. This would mean job creation, multiplied secondary economic activities and more small and medium scale enterprises, resulting in more job opportunities.

By focusing on aspects of the construction industry, it is possible to generate wealth and opportunities for emerging communities by introducing and facilitating mutually beneficial projects between these communities and the established formal sector. Mobilise joint ventures and partnerships involving business, community based and non-governmental organisations, facilitating the establishment of Co-operatives are but some of the options that can bring forth “Sustainable Development”.

The opportunity for creating "sweat equity" is also a great incentive for building one's own home. To more and more people this is very important, because their sweat equity is the only equity they can muster. Communities who are building their own homes do it in a state of excitement and eagerness. This is one of the last great sacrifices of the modern world that really pays off. What can be more satisfying than seeing one's own enthusiasm being converted directly into real net worth? Putting this energy and initiative to good use would be an obvious step in solving the crisis.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss the implementation in more detail and hope to hear from you soon.

Best regards
Hennie BOTES
Mobile: +27 84 657 4028

Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish, or teach how to fish.
They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry.
- Bill Drayton

