



# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

## A MYTH OR MAGIC IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Blyvooruitzicht mining community in Carletonville was left in limbo between authorities and companies since 2013 with almost zero service delivery and no clear direction of what their future looks like. In a response to a company's SLP requirements and at the request of the Local Municipality, Beulah Africa facilitated a three-day Interactive Community Based Planning (ICBP) workshop whereby community members participated in various interactive activities that helped them analyse their own situation. From the workshop, the community participants identified an outreach initiative they believed were important to undertake. Because the community had no waste removal services since 2013, waste has been disposed in any and all open spaces. Being active participants in their own development, a mass clean-up project was initiated by the workshop participants. With rubber gloves and black bags, 33 people took the streets and started cleaning; young and old, male and female, everyone working together. Three months later, this project has grown to 70 people actively cleaning their community, without compensation, simply because they were given the pen to write their own development story (self-mobilisation). #itsBeulah

Unfortunately, not all participation processes yield such amazing results! Why is that? The notion of true interactive public participation is the magic. The principle of participation and joint action advocates that development interventions should be a collective action, and not just be imposed upon communities without their meaningful involvement. It highlights that development is not about what can be done *for* communities (service delivery mode), but rather what can be done *with* them (development oriented). Local communities know their own needs, strengths and desires best and should therefore be involved from the onset of development planning. If organisations and/or development workers have a predetermined plan of what they want to do in a community, they are in services delivery mode and not following a development orientation. The participation principle promotes co-operation and shared accountability between all parties in the implementation process.

The concept of a "participation ladder" is often used to explain the "levels" of participation more clearly with *self-mobilisation* as the highest level

of participation and *manipulative participation* as the myth or false participation on the lowest end (Khanya & Chambers).

- **Self-Mobilisation:** People participate by taking initiative independently of external institutions and retain control over how resources are used.
- **Interactive Participation:** People participate in joint analysis, the development of action plans and the formation or strengthening of local institutions. It follows a systemic and structured learning process.
- **Functional Participation:** Participation seen by external agencies to achieve project goals. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement tends to arise only after external agents have already made major decisions.
- **Participation for Material Incentives:** People participate by contributing resources, for example, labour in return for food, cash or other material incentives.
- **Participation by Consultation:** People participate by engaging in conversation and by answering questions. External agents define the problems as well as the information gathering processes, and so control the analysis. Such a consultative process does not allow any shared decision making and professionals are under no obligation to take into consideration the views of the people.
- **Passive Participation:** People participate through being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements without any listening to people's responses.
- **Manipulative Participation:** Participation is simply pretence, with "people's representatives" on official boards, but who are not elected and have no power.

Mining companies are often guilty of exercising passive participation, or functional participation at the most, resulting into moderate community development outcomes. The higher the participation, the greater the chances of success and long-term sustainability. Thus, interactive participation is the magic in community development and should be aspired to, especially in the drafting of development plans (e.g. SLP's). As Henry Ford once said: "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success".



### ABOUT THE WRITER

Roné Coetzee is a social entrepreneur and a sustainable development activist specializing in rural, agrarian, health, education and social development. She holds a Masters degree in Development Studies (UFS), a Bachelor's degree in community development (UNISA) and numerous certificates relevant to mining, training, BBBEE and Social Responsibility.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

- Interactive community based planning workshops
- SLP writing and management
- Community stakeholder engagements
- Participatory planning
- Social impact assessment (SIA)
- Community empowerment workshops
- Community development training for SLP practitioners
- Project management of development projects
- Soft skills & entrepreneurship trainings

### OTHER SERVICES

- Skills Development Facilitation (SDF) services
- Training management and SETA liaison
- Employment equity and skills audits
- Bursary and internship programmes
- Soft skills training
- B-BBEE consulting



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