MAPPING THE EMERGENCE OF LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA SINCE THE DAWN OF DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an explorative discourse on strategies used for local economic development since the dawn of a new democracy in South Africa. In doing so, the study reflected on international experience and current local economic development practices while at the same time focusing on variables that could be characterized as enablers or barriers to successful implementation in poor areas. It is a theoretical paper, hinged upon secondary analysis of publications in relation to local economic development between the period of 1994 and 2004 with a specific intent to understand the strength and weakness of the foundations upon which the current policies are based. The synthesis focused on concepts such as poverty alleviation initiatives linked to land-based local economic development in South Africa. The study concluded that while there are similarities in the emergence of LED across the global spectrum, less developed countries such as South Africa continue to face a myriad of challenges related to policy development, execution, monitoring and evaluation. It was further recommended that strategic intents for LED should be aligned to community aspirations to have a sustainable impact. It was further recommended that while donor agencies remain crucial, proper allocation and reporting mechanisms may help sustain relationships between LED practitioners and funders. Lastly, it was recommended that a strong and legitimized political will and leadership are vital in encouraging popular participation and sustained community based response.

Key words: Community engagement, Empowerment initiatives, Local economic development, Policy development and execution, Political will and leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

That dawn of democracy in South Africa ushered new possibilities from multi-perspectival sectoral points of view. One of these perspectives was the concept of local economic development which was imported from developed countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia (Nel, 2001). While the reasons for the adoption of local economic development strategies in both wealthy and poor countries are many and varied, Nel (2001:1004) traces this move to "the so-called development impasse". More specifically, this came about as a direct result of the slump in the economic growth of industrialized countries after World War II (Geddes, 2004). The downward spiral of the economies of these industrialized countries placed a lot of pressure on governments, especially local government, to become more innovative in trying to attract investment. The decline in economic growth in the global economy,which started in the 1970's, necessitated local authorities to become more entrepreneurial (OECD, 2004). This resulted in a phenomenon that is referred to as "place marketing". "Place marketing" generally encourages local government structures to compete with one another in order to attract investment from outside by promoting their respective economic advantages.

According to Geddes (2004), local economic development in the United Kingdom and the European Union emerged in the 1980's as a response to the growing problems of unemployment caused by economic restructuring and industrial declinein old areas. This took the form of closer interaction and co-operation between local government, community-based groups, and trade unions. This interaction was premised on the notion that greater government and social interaction would promote sustainable job creation. As a result, co-operatives and community businesses were established. A number of enterprise zones, urban development corporations and enterprise councils were established. These initiatives were all underpinned by comprehensive training for community members in various disciplines of businessand skills development. In the early 1990's these LED initiatives were further entrenched by the establishment of government funds such as the "SingleRegeneration Budget and the City Challenge" (Geddes, 2004).

Geddes (2004) argued that the European LED approach focused on three key principles. Firstly, it emphasized the stimulation of community-based enterprises. Secondly, it envisaged government having a particular role of providing resources for these local initiatives. Thirdly, extensive training underpinned most of these community- based

initiatives.

The experiences in North America were not very different from those of Europe. According to (Dewar, 1998), LED emerged and became fashionable in the USA in theearly 1970's as a response to a decline in economic growth, and also as a tool to stimulate economic growth. These initiatives were especially directed at areas situated outside large cities. Intervention programs initiated by government took the form of loans, grants and tax breaks. Many important lessons can be learnt from the USA experience.

While LED in African countries has very much taken the same evolutionary route as in the wealthy countries (Nel, 2001) where the lack of external investment anddeclining economy necessitated an inward looking approach, the African experience of LED is premised on the strategy of self-reliance. According to Nel & Binns (1999), the importance of local control and empowerment, together with a reliance onlocal initiative and resourcefulness, are some of the key characteristics of LEDinitiatives in African countries. While LED between the "two worlds" (rich and poor)appears to be very similar, there are differences in so far as the scale and focus are concerned. In the wealthy countries, for example, LED focuses on investment, big business support and large project development undertaken by relatively well- resourced local agencies. On the other hand, LED initiatives in many Third World countries often take the form of "community-based initiatives, utilizing indigenous skills and seeking primarily to ensure survival, rather than participation in the global economy," (Nel and Binns, 1999). Nel and Binns further argue that the reasons why the self-reliance approach adopted by many African countries proliferated as a means to stimulate local economic growth, was a basic response to the structural adjustment;debt crisis; drought; war; civil strife; and the failure of top-down development schemes as experienced in these countries. These issues have forced many African countries to look at their own resources and skills to cope with the harsh realities of poverty and underdevelopment.

This notwithstanding, developing countries in Africa are further challenged by the impact of globalization and decentralization on the LED policies that they adopt. Ballard & Schwella (2000, p. 737) argue that while "globalization could facilitate economic and social upliftment in the communities served by local government",their study of seven metropoles in South Africa showed that local government in South Africa has been isolated from international relations for a long period. Their findings reveal that many of these

metropoles have not developed specific strategies on globalization. Additionally, some metropolitan municipalities “were still debating as to whether to proceed with an international relations policy … as it was felt thatthe focus should be placed on local economic and social development (Ballard & Schwella, 2000, p. 745). Ifthis is true for large municipalities that have relatively better skilled staff, more resources and less developmental backlogs, it would be unrealistic to expect small rural local municipalities to develop policies and strategies on globalization and how they intend to harness the opportunities it presents. As it is shown later in this thesis, rural municipalities are struggling to develop coherent policies on dealing with foreign investors who are constantly looking for opportunities within specific municipal areas. Consequently, these municipalities are not benefiting from the potential economic gains that are generally associated with globalisation.

2. METHODS

This research is based on interpretivist philosophy and is organized around theoretical paper principles. A theoretical paper can be characterized as a methodical approach to the formation of theories as well as the progress of currently accepted theoretical perspectives through the use of logic and evidence to reach conclusions **(Zhou, et al., 2017)**. It focuses on what are known as theory building blocks, which are variables and concepts that provide a causal explanation for certain phenomena **(Whetten, 1989)**.

What, when, how, and why are the four critical components that make up a theory. The focus of this research was on what makes up local economic drivers. The second section of this theoretical work examines the when principle. This concept is aware of time-based occurrences that have an impact on the application of theory within the context of the other components' balance. Economic drivers are influenced by events such as the principle of population density and the concept of dispersed populations, both of which are postulated by this study **(Moller, 2019)**. The how component is the fourth building block that informs this theoretical study. This principle is crucial in this research since it establishes concerns of causality and correlation between variables. The study variables are operationalized and the procedural activities and procedures done to explain the phenomena are considered using this paradigm **(Mintzberg, 2005)**. The final level of a theoretical investigation focuses on the theory's rationale or reason **(Whetten, 1989)**. It is established the justification and reasoning for factorial significance in the context of social, economic, and psychological importance as a solution to a prevailing problem. The goal of this

investigation is to determine the significance of the theory and why it should be used in the discussion of local economic growth drivers. A theoretical paper's goal is to make a theoretical contribution to solving a current problem or phenomenon **(Corley & Gioia, 2011)**.

3. SYNTHESIS

3.1 LED and poverty alleviation: A reality check

economic development is generally accepted to have the potential to stimulate growth and create the much needed job opportunities in poor communities. However, international experience indicates that there are relatively few instances where it has led to poverty alleviation (Rogerson, 1999). This is further illustrated by the findings of Dewar (1998), in her evaluation of LED programs in the United States. In this evaluation of the Minnesota Economic Recovery Fund, she argues that such programsdo not achieve their explicit goals and have little influence on the level or distributionof economic growth (Dewar, 1998). A more alarming finding is that areas designated as distressed areas are less likely to benefit from these programs or interventions. While some explanations for this failure centers around the lack of understanding on how to stimulate growth, Dewar (1998) argues that this is not completely true. Her analysis points to particular political imperatives that determine where funding would be channeled. According to Dewar, the requirements of public office prompts elected officials to act in ways that are inconsistent with achieving the explicit goals of programs to encourage economic growth or to redistribute growth to poor areas. Eventhough politicians feel responsible for their constituencies, and support programs that will bring about real economic growth, they are not able to influence the employment and income of workers. This is the onus of business owners, who decide where they will locate their businesses; the levels of investment; the number of people they will employ; as well as how much people will be paid (Dewar, 1998). This exposes the politicians to the danger of becoming pawns of business leaders and thereby perpetuating the skewed economic development.

The Minnesota case study is particularly important because it highlights the need for politicians to be vigilant and to make wise choices. LED can be used as a tool for politicians to ensure their re-election, or it can be applied to truly benefit the people whom the program purports to be assisting (Dewar, 1998). Another danger, as shown in the Minnesota example, is that if local economic development initiatives do not respond to the needs of

the political leaders, they stand to lose their funding (Cousins & Kepe, 2004). Due to the fickle nature of politicians, and the fact that theyare very dependent on popular support, it is very easy for programs to be stopped or changed at any sign of public opposition (Dewar, 1998). However, Nel (2001) shows that when LED initiatives develop as an endogenous response to market failures, it can ensure the economic survival of poor communities. Although LED does not have the ability to "propel" poor communities into the mainstream economy, Nel (1994) acknowledges that "in areas with limited economic prospects," it can provide much needed employment opportunities, which can become sustainable if they are supported adequately.

3.2 LED in South Africa

The post-apartheid government has inherited a national economy that had been stagnant for many years (Makgetla, 2004). The government's anti-poverty strategy was first articulated in the White Paper on the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) in 1994. It proposed several areas to be addressed in order to achievenotable transformation of the South African society. This development strategy was premised on the principle of community-based development. It stressed the importance of empowering local communities in all areas of the country, in order to undo the skewed development created by years of Apartheid development strategies. It is also important to note that the principlesof LED are contained in the RDP (Nel, 1997; Africa, 1994).

In South Africa, the LED policy focused on joint ventures between government, the private sector and local communities. The element of survival and self-reliance on indigenous technical knowledge, production systems and livelihoods are key characteristics of the strategy (Nel, 1999). Nel asserts that the single most important purpose for LED in many poor (rural) communities is to make a living in order to survive, rather than to participate in the global economy. LED also features prominently in the country's Urban and Rural Development Strategies. Some of the key principles underlying the LED strategy in South Africa include the following:

I. Job creation and poverty alleviation;
II. Targeting previously disadvantaged people, marginalized communities in rural areas;
III. Community involvement and local leadership; and

IV.Use of local resources and skills

There is, however, no single definition and interpretation for LED, hence the confusion in policy and implementation (Nel, 2001). Despite the fact that policy positions of government, the private sector and community groups are in place, there are not many successful LED initiatives that are documented in South Africa. The case of Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape (Nel, 1994) is perhaps a unique one[4] in that its LED strategy has been noted by Nel (1994) as a success. Even then it is important to understand these different policy positions of the different sectors of society in South Africa.

Firstly, the Urban Foundation, which is a policy think-tank for the private sector, suggests that LED in South Africa should follow a similar route as wealthier countries. It calls for local authorities to abandon their traditional managerial stance, but instead to become more entrepreneurial in the manner they approach their developmental mandate (Mawson, 1997). The Urban Foundation suggests the following policies, which are based on European and North American experience, to influence policy on local economic development:

- The establishment of Enterprise Boards to develop sector specific policies forsub-regional areas;
- The establishment of Urban Development Corporations to focus on the development of single major or 'flagship' projects;
- Privatization of local government activities to create local jobs, to promoteempowerment and to promote the improved use of resources;
- Public-private sector partnerships as formalized mechanisms designed to initiate development;
- Export processing zones;
- The creation of science and technology parks which promote the clustering ofsophisticated activities; and
- The development of small firm industrial districts

Secondly, South African Civics Organization (SANCO) also commissioned researchand made its own policy recommendations regarding the implementation of LED (Mawson, 1997). This policy position places community leadership in the forefront of all local development related matters. According to SANCO, all stakeholders must be brought

together to develop a common vision for the municipality around the development priorities. Community empowerment, local procurement and support for public works programs are strongly advocated. What SANCO argues is that there is no one universally-accepted strategy, but that local circumstances as well as needsand realities will influence the nature of the strategy adopted (Mawson, 1997).

Thirdly, the national government has its LED policy contained in three separate documents. These are the Urban Development Strategy (Africa, 1995a), Rural Development Strategy (Africa, 1995b) and the Draft National Policy for LED (Africa, 2003). These documents are vague on how government intends to achieve and implement LED. More specifically, they are not clear on the role that this policy should play and the degree to which it is prepared to contribute to the process of development. Nevertheless, government assumes the role of facilitator in creating an enabling environment for LED (Nel, 1997). To illustrate this, the National Policy Framework on LED describes the role of government as that of providing funds for local projects that have the greatest commitment to the three national policy thrusts, which are the establishment of a job-creating economic growth path; sustainable ruraldevelopment and urban renewal; and bringing the poor and the disadvantaged to the centre of development. The Department of Provincial and Local Government aims to give additional support to those LED activities that are more strongly focussed on *developmental* local government. This shows that apart from the promised funding, national government is not very explicit with regard to the support that is given to municipalities. Local municipalities are encouraged to develop their own policies and initiatives regarding their LED interventions.

The difference in emphasis of these three important role players in LED is perhaps one of the main reasons why there is no coherent implementation of LED initiativesin South Africa. Local municipalities are the implementing agents for LED and are therefore better placed to determine the pace, focus and scale of LED in the country. This, however, is a daunting task for many rural municipalities, who are struggling asa result of non-payment of services, high unemployment, poverty and migration of skilled labor to the cities. This situation is exacerbated by poor administration and limited opportunities for investment (Buso, 2003). Despite this adverse situation, it remains the responsibility of local government “to promote social and economic development” (Section 152 (i) (a) of the Constitution Act 108 of 1996). Rogerson (1999) identifies five intervention areas for local government to achieve itsconstitutional obligations to promote economic development.

These are to:

- Set a regulatory framework (i.e. laws, regulations, ordinances);
- Access to municipal services;
- Employment creation (e.g. local procurement);
- Security and Protection from natural disasters; and
- Coordination and integration

According to Rogerson (1999), few municipalities are conscious of how their LED strategies can be designed, structured and monitored, so as to ensure a systematic strengthening in the assets of the poor and the reduction in their vulnerability. He further points out that there is a lack of capacity within local government structures and even though there is policy support for LED and considerable interest being expressed, very few municipalities have established functional LED units. Results arelimited, as rural areas in South Africa often do not appeal to external investors (Kepe, 2001). Financial assistance from national and provincial government is lacking (Ntsebeza, 2000). Additionally, staff at local level is poorly trained and counselorsare also not helping much in providing direction on local economic development (Cousins and Kepe, 2004). Consequently, there are few LED interventions that are directed at poor communities. Municipalities that act on bad advice or do not make a concerted effort to conduct an audit of the skills-base of the poor people in their jurisdiction, tend to rely on the private sector and market forces to create economic growth. However, the authors argue that it is a foolish hope that this growth will create jobs or that it will trickle down to benefit the poor communities.

A more progressive approach that municipalities ought to take to ensure that poor communities benefit from LED initiatives is to integrate LED initiatives with other poverty alleviation strategies (Nel, 2001; Binns & Nel, 1999). This requires municipalities to work with the local poor and ensure that they supply these communities with municipal services. It also requires them to stop relying on externalfunding and to use creative local solutions for local problems. A comprehensive auditof the resources at hand should be the starting point. Some of the resources that are readily available in rural communities are an abundance of unskilled manual labor and land that can be used for agricultural and non-agricultural purposes as well as eco-tourism.

3.3 Land-Based LED In South Africa

In the fight against poverty, both government and development agencies are adopting an approach of encouraging people to make use of resources available in their local environments in order to improve their livelihoods. Thus, economic development projects being encouraged in the fight against poverty, seek to utilize land and naturalresources in ventures that range from commercial agriculture to mining; forestry; eco-tourism; and other commercialization of natural resources. However, as a consequence of past policies and legislation, access to and control over land and natural resources by certain population groups has historically been restricted. According to Hall (2004), land reform serves a symbolic function in the South African context. It is an attempt by the people of South Africa to undo the injusticesof the past. It is further used as a tool to facilitate nation building. Hall further purports that land reform is seen as a potential instrument of rural restructuring, to transform social and economic relations in rural areas, as well as a basis for pro-poor development. Therefore, the land reform programme, which is widely acknowledged as key to rural development in South Africa (Congress, 1994), can either restrict or enhance economic development opportunities in previously poor communities. Hall (2004) maintains that land reform has under-performed in its objective to transfer land to the marginalized poor. In the first decade of democracy, she argues, South Africa's land reform programme only transferred 2.9% of agricultural land to the poor.

3.3.1 Land Reform in South Africa

The main goal of land reform in South Africa is to provide re-dress for the racially based land dispossessions of the apartheid era. It is also aimed at significantly reducing the resulting highly inequitable distribution of land ownership. In addition,it seeks to create security of land tenure for all, thus providing a basis for land-based economic development. The three main components of land reform are restitution, redistribution and tenure reform.

The *Restitution* policy aims to restore land or provide alternative forms of re-dress (alternative land, financial compensation or preferential access to state development projects) to people dispossessed of their rights to land by racially discriminatory legislation and practice after 1913 (Hall, 2004). Policies and procedures for the resolution of land-claims are based on Section 25 of the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996 (Africa, 1996) and the Restitution of Land Rights Act, Act 22 of 1994 (Africa, 1994) as well as its

amendments. All land claims are against the State, rather than against people or organisations currently owning the land. A Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights investigates claims before they are submitted to the Land Claims Court for adjudication (Government of South Africa, 1997).

In 1997, the Restitution of Land Rights Act was amended, allowing claimants direct access to the Land Claims Court and giving the Minister of Land Affairs greater powers to settle claims by negotiation, rather than through legislative means. In 1998,a Restitution Review process initiated by the Minister of Land Affairs saw a closer integration of the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights and the Department of Land Affairs. Both the legislative changes and the implementation of the recommendations from the Restitution Review process have contributed to a considerable acceleration in the settling of claims. The majority are from urban areas and are mostly individual family claims, following removals under the Group Areas Act of 1950. Resolving rural land claims – which accounts for about 90 percent of allpeople claiming land – has proved to be more challenging. (Hall, 2004)

With regard to the land *redistribution* programme, the government aims to re-allocateland to the landless poor for residential and productive purposes. The government is committed to providing settlement and land acquisition grants to eligible individuals and groups in order to purchase land from willing sellers, including the state. Since mid-1999, when a new Minister took over the land portfolio, there has been a policy re-think on redistribution. Priority is now being given to the needs of 'emerging' commercial farmers. But it is hoped that the new focus will speed up the redistribution programme, which has not come close to achieving its original goals of redistributing 30 percent of agricultural land within five years (from 1994).

The third aspect of land reform is *land tenure reform*. Tenure reform aims to address issues such as insecurity of tenure, and overlapping and disputed land rights resulting from apartheid-era policies. Rural areas in the former bantustans are the most affected by these problems, as they bore the brunt of land-related apartheid laws. In many of these areas the land is still nominally owned by the state and held in trust forthe occupants. Most of the land is held 'communally', and in many areas is still under the jurisdiction of traditional authorities. A number of laws have been enacted to facilitate tenure reform. Lahiff (2001) argues that although tenure reform alone will not be able to solve the deep-rooted

problems of poverty in the former homelands, it will facilitate inward investment; more effective use of natural resources; and the protection of community and individual rights. Lahiff (2001) concludes that land reform has failed to bring about the expected transformation of land-holding. It is therefore important to realize that in order to achieve its objective; government's land reform policy must be more robust in its approach and tackle ruraland urban areas with the greatest need.

3.3.2 Challenges of Land Reform and its Role in Poverty Alleviation

It has now been widely accepted that land reform faces many challenges. Besides the widely cited slowness in implementation and political uncertainties, several studies show that land reform has not yet achieved the goal of decisively contributing to economic development in poor communities (Lahiff, 2001; Kepe & Cousins, 2002; Hall, 2004).

Firstly, because of the relatively small grants given to individuals for land acquisition, a group of often unrelated individuals are forced to be business partners in farming ventures, something which results in numerous conflicts (Hall, 2004). Eventually these conflicts serve as seeds for failure in these projects. Secondly, many land reform projects, including redistribution and restitution projects, have achieved less success due to lack of post-settlement support from government and other agencies (Lahiff, 2001; Hall, 2004). Thirdly, the reluctance of white commercial farmers to sell productive land for the purpose of land reform results in the land thatis redistributed being of a poor quality (Mokgope, 2000). Fourthly, others haveargued that black people in South Africa lack the required skills and motivation to engage in commercial farming (Tomkova, 2004).

3.3.3 Commonages in LED

Since land has been identified as key to rural development, municipalities are placed under tremendous political pressure to make commonage land available to emerging farmers (Benseler, 2003). 'Municipal commonage' refers to land granted by the State to towns for the use and benefit of its residents (Anderson & Pienaar, 2004). This concept was recognized by the post-apartheid government as an opportunity for land reform. Consequently, by 2002, new commonage accounted for 31% of all transferred land within the redistribution programme (Anderson & Pienaar, 2004). According to Benseler (2003), since 1995 the Department of Land Affairs' policywas to use commonage as a nurturing ground for emergent commercial farmers. She continues to argue that municipalities

suddenly inherited an extra responsibility without being allocated the required resources to implement the administration of commonages for commercial farming.

According to Benseler (2003), there are three main types of commonage users in South Africa. Firstly, there are subsistence farmers who keep very few livestock. These farmers usually do not have ambitions of owning large enterprises. Then there are the so-called 'emerging farmers' who have acquired livestock above subsistence level. Often they have the intentions of expanding their herds as the opportunity arises.

Finally, there are the 'proto-commercialists' who already have accumulated substantial livestock numbers and are in need of extra land to carry forward their commercial farming ambitions. However, the use of commonages to achieve the goal of encouraging emerging commercial farming in municipalities is facing many challenges. One of the challenges is the fact that local authorities still do not see land reform as part of their responsibility – especially given the demands for housing and other service provision that they face at local level (Anderson and Pienaar, 2004). Other problems relating to the difficulties of using commonage land for LED vary from area to area. This thesis, particularly Chapter Four, explores some of the dynamics of commonage use in Groblershoop, Northern Cape.

4. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, this paper has introduced the concept of local economic development and how it has emerged in both wealthy and poor countries. While thereare similarities in the emergence of LED, less wealthy countries, like South Africa face additional challenges in relation to the implementation of this policy. Amongst these is the weak economic base of local municipalities. Lessons from international experience show that South Africa can learn several lessons from how LED has been implemented in wealthy countries.

Firstly, LED strategies need to be in line with the interest of the community members, which contribute to the sustainability of the approach. Secondly, external support in the form of donor agencies remains crucial. Thirdly, a strong and legitimate political leadership to encourage popular participation is important.

In the case of South Africa, this study shows land has potential to contribute to LED. More specifically, commonage land has a key role to play in LED. This makes the land reform programme a crucial undertaking, because local authorities face multiple challenges,

which range from human resources to financial shortages. `

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