

Incomprehension follows the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme

In mid-2009, when the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme was unveiled, Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti, stressed this as 'a novel approach to rural development in South Africa', ringing in a new dispensation that would transform the rural landscape. But three years down the line, local interventions and the participation of local communities remain a concern as the programme seemingly repeats many of the mistakes of previous initiatives, write *Tim Hart* and *Peter Jacobs*.

By way of background, the government of South Africa has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the lot of the rural poor since 1994. The first attempts at land reform – especially agricultural land redistribution – focused on the rural poor. As the land redistribution programme and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) changed focus, the government started implementing programmes aimed at the poorest rural districts.

The first of these was President Mbeki's Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP), concentrating on 13 rural nodes. In 2009 this programme was superseded by the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), introduced by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) under the Zuma administration.

More of the same

When the CRDP was introduced, it was considered novel, largely because of the proposed active participation and

engagement of officials with local communities, other line departments and local private sector and municipal actors.

This participation was to be accompanied by the willingness of officials to learn from experiences and address shortcomings as the process unfolded. But this does not seem to be happening and the CRDP appears similar to its predecessor, the ISRDP, in that much of the activities appear to be ad hoc, rather than comprehensive or integrated. Furthermore, under the CRDP existing activities are often refunded, or those that have collapsed, rekindled.

Clearly, the government is not stingy about spending money on rural development; this is evident from Table 1, which illustrates the notable increase in expenditure on the three core components of the CRDP between 2009 and 2013. Rural development spending, as part of the overall budget, has increased almost ten-fold during this period. However, what is not clear is exactly what this money is being spent on: salaries, consultants or actual rural requirements?

Table 1: Direct fiscal spending on rural development through the DRDLR, 2009-2013.

Sub-programme expenditure	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Rural infrastructure development	39 498	145 499	270 064	368 060
Social, technical rural livelihood and institutional facilitation	32 619	211 969	420 352	259 246
National Rural Youth Services Corps (NARYSEC)	4 686	3 023	95 836	413 902
Total rural development spending (R'000)	76 803	360 491	786 252	1 041 208
Total DRDLR spending (R'Billion)	5.86	7.12	7.99	8.97
Rural development spending (%)	1.31	5.06	9.83	11.6

Source: National Treasury, 2013 (Vote 33, p13)

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Little progress made

In October 2012, the DRDLR made a presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Rural Development and Land Reform, highlighting the drafting of a Green Paper on Rural Development. The portfolio committee urged the DRDLR to align its strategic vision, plans and programmes to the National Development Plan Vision 2030.

The rollout of the programme has continued, but with very little feedback about progress. Currently, and perhaps belatedly given the upcoming 2014 elections, the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency and the DRDLR are busy with a national evaluation of the CRDP. Unfortunately, this updated information is not yet available, so we have to turn to the DRDLR Strategic Plan for 2011-2014 (DRDLR 2013), amended in February 2013, and other documents obtained from the DRDLR for information about the programme's progress since 2009.

The date for completion of the programme is set as 1 April 2014. By the third-quarter of 2009, the DRDLR had identified nine CRDP pilot sites, consisting of a total of 20 wards, with the village of Muyexe in Greater Giyani Rural District Municipality, Limpopo, as the flagship. At the end of the 2009/10 financial year, the number of wards was increased to 29 in total.

However, most intervention activities remained in the original nine sites and continued to do so for the next period. During the course of the 2010/11 financial period, another 45 wards were added to the CRDP. By the end of the 2011/12 period, a further 13 wards and five entire local municipalities were added, bringing the total number of wards and local municipalities included in the CRDP to 92 (or 58%) out of the intended target of 160 poorest rural wards in the country. From the perspective of expanding

the CRDP, these figures initially appear relatively impressive; especially if one considers that the DRDLR is a new ministry, with several new chief directorates whose mandates are no longer confined exclusively to land reform but more broadly, to drive rural development across South Africa for the entire rural population. In reality, this expansion is quite simply an expansion of the ISRDP of the Mbeki era. Furthermore, very little service delivery has taken place in these 'old' and new areas. It seems the primary activities are the identification of more wards, discussions with traditional leaders/ward councillors and the rolling out of ward-level household profiling using the War on Poverty survey questionnaire.

DRDLR 2013 confirms the rather limited progress. Out of the identified 92 wards and local municipalities, only 60 have been profiled along with 90 land reform farms in these areas. More worrisome is the fact that only 25 status quo reports have been 'more or less' completed as some are still awaiting finalisation of the identified interventions, indicating that not even the preliminary scoping, planning and mobilisation work for the first 29 wards, identified in 2009, has been completed.

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Limited community participation

Somehow these activities are supposed to contribute towards participation by the rural communities. Although the profiling and planning process is clearly more extractive than participatory, in the sense that instead of engaging in participatory discussions and exchanges, the War on Poverty survey with its preconceived categories and ideas is the primary tool used in this exercise and simply elicits responses to predetermined questions. Residents have no space to provide their perceptions of their reality, but must rather respond to a national standardised questionnaire that ignores local circumstances and reasons for diverse local experiences. At no time do residents ever get the opportunity to engage with the data.

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Needs analysis and planning are usually done by officials based on the War on Poverty survey snapshots, which quite simply attempt to identify the poorest households, but ignore household livelihood diversity and reasons for poverty within households. Acceptance of plans takes place at the ward-level council of stakeholders meetings, attended by government officials, civil society and community representatives, including councillors, traditional leaders and school governing bodies. Clearly this process is weighted in favour of the elite, and seems to be an activity that simply ratifies government proposed plans. How an instrument such as the War on Poverty questionnaire and the survey process amount to community participation and mobilisation is beyond comprehension. A more transformative approach seems appropriate in which change is driven locally and government and civil society provide the resources and framework for transformation.

In terms of the 'food security for all' targets, the intention is to establish 67 929 food gardens and 39 agri-parks, which include a nursery, vegetable gardens and a processing plant, across the 160 wards by the 2014 deadline. This measure is intended to ensure that 60% of households in the CRDP wards meet their own food requirements through household food gardens. By the end of 2010, a total of 1 346 food gardens (2% of target) and two agri-parks (5% of target) had been established. This project-based focus on rural development and food security is ad hoc rather than comprehensive or integrated.

Skills development suffering

The capacitating and skilling of rural residents has also been slow. The target includes both land reform beneficiaries and residents within rural wards – a figure that is likely in the

millions. However, no quantitative target was provided, and at the beginning of 2011 only 472 people had participated in skills programmes.

A total of 9 949 rural residents had been employed through the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the local CRDP-linked interventions, such as infrastructure development and roads maintenance, by the beginning of 2011. One of the problems with this strategy is that local people perform the unskilled activities while qualified non-residents carry out the skilled components. A more practical approach would be to train some local people in the necessary skills.

Youth employment is largely centred on the National Rural Youth Services Corps (NARYSEC). While these young people are supposed to be trained to provide the services of community development workers (CDWs) to their wards for two years, combined with leadership skills, most seem to have been quite simply employed in the once-off household profiling, with some being included in the EPWP in some rural wards. The SA Yearbook 2011/12 suggests that 7 958 youth participated in the NARYSEC programme. Participants in NARYSEC receive a stipend of R60 per day, which may increase as the level of skills training increases.

It seems that the conceptualisation of local interventions, along with the identification of ward-level participants in these projects, is a concern and seems to repeat many of the mistakes of previous programmes.

Conclusion

The government seems to be spending a significant amount of fiscal resources on a single programme, but it needs to be spent wisely and effectively to ensure real improvement in the lives of rural residents.

Unfortunately, and despite the good intentions of government, it seems that the conceptualisation of local interventions, along with the identification of ward-level participants in these projects, is a concern and seems to repeat many of the mistakes of previous programmes. Furthermore, there seems to be another likely shift in the orientation of rural development if it is to be aligned to the National Development Plan Vision 2030, and this is seemingly not based on any lessons learned to date. ■

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