

Need for collaboration, cooperation, co-creation during Covid-19 pandemic

Speaking at a recent Trialogue webinar, 'Supporting local government in the midst of a global pandemic', Paul Smith, Kagiso Trust's local government support head, recounted its ongoing work with the Makana municipality in the Eastern Cape as a case study of what can be achieved through collaboration, cooperation and the co-creation of solutions among all local stakeholders.



Paul Smith, local government support head, Kagiso Trust

"When people set aside their differences and get their hands dirty, working together, things get done," said Smith.

The Kagiso Trust began working with the Makana Municipality finance department in 2018, assisting with debt and revenue management issues, as well as building capacity and transferring skills. Municipal revenues were shrinking year-on-year and service delivery levels were rapidly declining. The municipality was losing its ability to attract people to this once sought-after town and unemployment levels are increasing to a staggering all-time high.

'One size doesn't fit all'

"At Kagiso, we wanted to reimagine our support for local government and to think of ways how expanding our support could have a direct impact on marginalised communities. Our work with local governments was having some impact, but whether that was filtering through to the greater community was debateable," said Smith.

"We believe we should think a little differently when supporting local government and work on co-creating solutions and place less emphasis on issues-based support. One size doesn't fit all.

"In Makana we included three new elements over and above revenue management support. The first one was indigent management – identifying the people who are the poorest of the poor who need the most social support, and to link these vulnerable people to the output of the LED (local economic development) strategy. Second was to develop a meaningful commonly accepted LED strategy for Makana that would promote sustainable local job creation. Third was community engagement to support the formation of an integrated stakeholder coalition to co-create solutions for local challenges."

Diverse views and perspectives

Smith said building stakeholder cohesion is no simple task. Active communities and institutions with diverse views and perspectives have to set aside their differences, agree to collaborate and organise themselves for meaningful constructive engagement. This also meant getting the municipality ready to engage with the communities in the same manner. From this was born the Makana Circle of Unity (MCU) platform.

Makana has a very active civil society who are passionately interested in the region's prosperity. This group of committed citizens were often referred to as the 'Circular Firing Squad', agreeing on the need for change, but had no consensus on how to achieve it. Kagiso Trust recognised this positive energy as the essential ingredient for transformation and to re-model social cohesion for sustainable change and thus instituted discussions with stakeholders in 2019.

The MCU gained momentum and started to organise itself by creating various focus groups (clusters) that would attract

stakeholders with relevant interests and skills. Municipal department heads were represented in all clusters, providing a first-time opportunity for officials and civil society to share views and agree on key focus areas and initiatives.

Reaping the dividends

The new MCU collaborative structure has started reaping the dividends: relationships have started mending, people are discussing issues and coming up with solutions, previously polarised groups have started collaborating.

The MCU has enabled a new Food Security cluster to coordinate feeding schemes and enhance the regional response to the food security crisis during Covid-19. This includes collaboration with government agencies SASSA, DSD, SAP and the municipality, making food parcel delivery possible while adhering to lockdown regulations.

Members of the MCU have also assisted in developing Covid-19 communication material, manufacturing of face masks, producing sanitation liquid and actively participating in the Municipal Joint Operation Committee (JOC) meetings.

Platform to find meaningful solutions

“Members of the MCU are all like-minded people interested in fixing the city. Through the MCU, stakeholders now have a platform to engage constructively and positively and find meaningful solutions,” said Smith.

“If all relative local stakeholders collaborate – community, government and business – and act, then the local collective ownership of issues and interventions will improve the prospect of positive change. Relevant integration and impactful programmes that are co-created by local stakeholders have a greater prospect of sustainable impact to enable local communities to prosper so poverty can be alleviated.”

Makana leadership has demonstrated that transformation is possible, says the Kagiso Trust, when people set aside differences, embrace disruption, remain people centric and hold each other accountable.

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