

## National News

### Local Initiative Provides Alternative to Mining: The Story of Simbhademe

- People, Place and Possibility *By Sandy Heather*

There are so many ethical questions in the world today but one of the biggest regards the 'rightness' of imposing one worldview/value system/socio-economic model on another. When the dominant forces are so overwhelming how does a rural amaPondo community attract 'development' that is in keeping with their integrity, who they are and what they stand for when their needs are so different from those that 'government' and 'corporates' think they should be satisfying?

But the concept of 'development' does exist in integrity and it is alive and well in a number of small grassroots organisations and their programmes. Thanks to initiatives like this solidarity economy newsletter these initiatives can be networked to become a powerful force of alternative development that is built now and can replace the 'old order' when it collapses.

As one of the solutions to rural development needs in Pondoland we have been running a highly successful pilot Local Economic Development (LED) programme (in line with ecological principles) for the last 3 years. 'We' are the local people of the area assisted by Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC), an NGO established to support local thinking and needs. The programme incorporates personal development, skills acquisition, knowledge development, understanding, relationships, networking, micro-projects and mentoring driven at a grassroots level with no complicated imposition of structures and paperwork which 2nd economy/inclusive economy/solidarity economy people should not have to face. It is designed within the amaPondo cultural system, conducted in the local language, nested in African spirituality and sanctioned by the Queen of the amaPondo.



Simbhademe (so named by the participants and meaning 'we discover' in amaPondo) has been designed through total participation by local people. The consultation came *before* and *during* the design, not as in many cases where consultation comes *after* decisions have been made. After the design stage 5 representatives were elected by their communities from each of 6 villages to participate directly in the programme.

A deeply divided, hurt and angry group of people (largely due to the threat of mining on their lands) have developed a sense of kinship, learned to listen to each other and respect differences and have focused on positive initiatives that bring them together rather than separate them. Whilst the issues in the area are by no means resolved, the focus is now on building things up rather than breaking things down and warring factions are communicating on a new level. People have developed within themselves and in their relationships with others because of the growth in their levels of self-esteem. This was confirmed by an external evaluation of the project, which found participants saying things like 'I felt like a rusty can that had been thrown away when I started Simbhademe but now I feel like I have been recycled and that I have value at last!'. Through this process people have come to define development in ways such as 'Development is a process in which a community of people strives to make it possible for all members to satisfy their basic human needs and enhance the quality of their lives without damaging the environment.'

The external evaluation of the project also states:

*The group also believe they were brought together to meet and work with each other to develop a sense of being a team, of caring deeply for each other, of connecting with and learning about other communities on the Wild Coast and building co-operation and support. Simbhademe has grown to become a core or reference group of thirty inspired and enthusiastic people from six communities with a strong sense they are part of a bigger family.*

For more information:

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