



Best Practices Database

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Partners Education Network's Schools Project, Richards Bay

South Africa

Good Practice

New for 2002

Categories: Children and Youth:
 - 0-9 years
 - 10 years to adult
 Social Services:
 - education

Level of Activity: City/Town

Ecosystem: Tropical/Sub-Tropical

Summary

The project aims at improving the standard of education and teaching in 38 "adopted" schools situated in the previously disadvantaged areas of Zululand through a variety of interventions and improvements in facilities, the development of governing bodies and training of teachers and principals. The project targets 11 high schools and their feeder schools over a 12-year period in an attempt to create an uninterrupted chain of excellence in a child's education and school life. The project benefits over 32,000 scholars whose individual progress is monitored through an extensive database kept by the ZCBF. One of the specific objectives of the project is to improve the matrix of pass rate of the "adopted" schools from a starting point of 38% to a rate of 80% at the end of the 12 years.

The project was initiated by BHP Billiton Aluminium (BHP BASA), then known as Alusaf, in an attempt to deal with the unmanageable number of applications for funding regularly being received from over 800 schools in the region. Rather than making small contributions to a large number of schools, it was decided that it was better to design an approach that would be of real benefit to a limited number of schools. The schools were initially identified as a result of a survey conducted to ascertain which schools were attended by the children of Alusaf employees (although these children only constituted about 5% of the children who benefited from the project). Approximately 50% of the schools under this initiative are in semi-urban areas while the rest are situated in rural areas.

Narrative

SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

There was fundamental problem in education. Teachers were not well qualified and on top of that they rarely come to class to teach. Students were not getting what they deserve to get in school and also students spent most of their time in the streets rather than in school.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

The priorities of this initiative with respect to developing PEN Schools are:

1. Provision of resources (improvement of resources e.g teaching aids, duplicating machines, computers, etc) to foster more effective teaching
2. Training of principals and Teachers
3. Training of governing bodies

The primary objective of the project is to improve the academic standards of participating schools. With this in mind and taking into account the findings of an independent needs analysis carried out by Tri-Ed Educational Consultants, the above development priorities were agreed upon by the project's steering committee. The needs analysis report was based on information obtained by the consultants on visiting each school.

FORMULATION OF OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Specific Objectives

1. An improvement of the matric of pass rate at PEN Schools from an average of 39% to 80% over the 12 year period in which the project will operate.
2. Training teachers to make them competent in their work through instilling skills in them.

Strategies

Based on two independent studies, it became increasingly evident that a change of attitude in all stakeholders was very essential. Strategies requisite in achieving this end are:

1. Including the community and educators in decision making;
2. Improving schools governance through management training;
3. Providing schools with essential equipment;
4. Professional development of educators and support staff;
5. Learner access to curriculum enhancing activities (e.g. career guidance, sport coaching, etc)

MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES

Considering the enormity of the challenges facing the schools and especially financial constraints, it has been necessary to develop a synergistic approach to make the best possible use of all available resources:

1. BHP BASA has always made use of development professionals to ensure the appropriate use of funds.
2. BHP BASA entrusted the management of the project to a successful NGO, which had been instrumental in the establishment of the ZCBF.
3. The partnership with ZCBF has provided the schools with unlimited access to invaluable resources available at the ZCBF community park e.g. career guidance, training on new technologies, etc.
4. Schools were assisted with development of committees including community, educators and management who together came up with individual school development plans.
5. BHP BASA uses it's buying power as a large industry together with order quantities to optimise use of available funds.
6. Partnerships were formed with schools, communities and other organisations/NGOs in order to provide resources to schools. For instance, booksmart recently provided all of these schools with reference books. The school communities provided transport and the initiative paid for the fuel needed to transport the books.
7. A Forum has been established to facilitate collaboration between schools, Department of Education, management structures and existing and potential donors in establishing development priorities.

PROCESS

The communities did not regard the initiative's efforts to develop the area through its intervention in the communities' development processes as real assistance. In order to secure community support in the short term, it was necessary to make initial investments into tangible improvements such as

installation of computers and basic school materials.

In the long term community support has been encouraged through school governing bodies, development committees and joint management workshops with school management staff. Clusters, which were initially set up to fairly establish priorities, were unsuccessful. This was because cluster representatives, who met quarterly with the project managers, were biased in that they were only concerned with their own schools. A forum (the pen forum) consisting of Department of education management staff, high school and primary school representatives that were voted in by all of the principals, the ZCBF field officer and the project manager was established. The Forum has set up policies and procedures to ensure equity among schools.

In spite of extensive consultation during the planning phase, poor school governance and a "the world owes me" attitude amongst some school stakeholders, impeded progress because resources and opportunities were not fully utilised. Annual school audits identified schools affected by this problem and corrective action in the form of mentoring was undertaken. In addition, the PEN Forum will in future work together with these schools to find solutions to this problem.

Existing Unsolved Problems

1. School Fees: In rural schools the prevailing inability/unwillingness of parents to pay even nominal school fees is further being accelerated by the exponential increase in the number of orphans infected with HIV/AIDS pandemic.
2. Staff Absenteeism: The results of HIV/AIDS are becoming increasingly evident in the absentee rate of teachers and administrative staff
3. Staff Turnover: After training the staff members in acquiring professional standards, they tend to transfer to better-resourced schools.

Decision Making Processes

The Education Trust established by the ZCBF, including donor and industry representation sets the project policy and direction in response to annual project audits and recommendations by the PEN Forum and the Project Manager. The finances and the processes of the project are audited in accordance with policies set by the education trust.

The PEN Forum, which is integral to the problem solving and decision making process of the project, consists of the following:

1. The regional chief director of education- Empangeni region
2. Relevant department of education -district managers
3. Relevant department of education -circuit managers
4. 1 high school and 2 primary school principals per district (i.e. two districts, therefore, two high schools and four primary school principals)
5. The ZCBF project field officer
6. The ZCBF project manager
7. Representatives from other corporate stakeholders and specialists that may be able to assist with specific problems are invited from time to time.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

1. The graphs below indicate a dramatic improvement in the matric results achieved. Of particular note is that averages obtained at PEN Schools are consistently higher than those obtained provincially.
2. The improved matric results indicate that pupils are beginning to react to more effective teaching. Schools have become conducive for learning and have contributed a lot to the socialisation of students. Additionally, through schools, students can attain their full potential.
3. Learners from PEN Schools are now accessing bursaries
4. The successful establishment of the PEN Forum is indicative of a significant attitude change with schools working together and taking responsibility for their own development
5. The Provincial Education Development Unit (PEDU), set up by the provincial department of education to co-ordinate the implementation of projects funded outside of the department, has used

PEN as one of the projects to develop their model of best practise.

6. Mr. Wentworth Dorkin, regional chief director of education has often been heard saying that the outcomes of a project such as this are immeasurable, as the project is essentially an investment in the future of the scholars.

Measuring the Impact of the initiative

1. The impact is measured through a comparison of matric results from year to year
2. A database detailing the progress of all students at PEN Schools has been established and is updated annually
3. Bi-annual audits are carried out at each school to evaluate use of resources.

SUSTAINABILITY

Financial Sustainability

Although the project funder is committed to the project for a period of 12 years, great care has been taken in ensuring that we are not overly dependant on the agency. For example, funds have by no means been used in meeting operational overheads such as water and electricity expenses. The funding has been used in:

1. Providing resources, which are taken care of and maintained by the school;
2. Training of management and governing bodies in order to empower them to become more effective in sustaining the school beyond the stipulated period of operation.

Social and economic:

A concerted effort has been made to involve the community and encourage them to take responsibility of the schools, fostering a healthy social environment. A specific social and economic spin-off of the project is, the schools will be producing graduates more likely to study at tertiary level (because they are eligible for bursaries and have had access to career guidance and counselling) and thus, in the long run improve their standard of living.

Cultural Sustainability

The active involvement of communities in decision-making ensures long-term cultural sustainability. The initiative tries to integrate cultures through teaching people the importance of living in harmony even in the face of cultural diversity.

LESSONS LEARNED

Important lessons learned within the project

1. Communication is key to the success of the project. This has resulted in the establishment of the PEN Forum and an informal network of local corporate donors and NGO's.
2. A blanket development approach cannot be applied to a number of different schools because schools have different strengths and weaknesses. For this reason a separate development plan has been compiled for each school.
3. Positive re-enforcement of the schools is essential in maintaining morals in the schools. As a result of feedback received from the PEN Forum, schools are portrayed to the media as active participants in the project rather than beneficiaries.

Lessons learned from other initiatives

1. School management interventions must be matched with departmental interventions. If capacity is created within the schools that does not exist at higher levels, inconsistencies result, which create frustration. As a result a certain amount of training has been conducted in by the initiative in conjunction with department of education officials and they have been included in management training offered to principals. More training of officials from the department of education is planned for the future.
2. The development initiative should not be overly dependent. Instead it should try to cater for some of its running costs.

TRANSFERABILITY

Information/Knowledge Sharing:

The project has adopted a policy of transparency and information sharing. The project has been instrumental in establishing informal networks between like-minded organisations and projects in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, because of an extensive publicity campaign on a local and national level, the project has been visited by people from all over the country wanting to gather ideas for development of their own areas. E.g. dignitaries from the Gauteng department of education attended a presentation this year, on the PEN Project.

Examples of benefits from the experience/expertise of others:

The PEN Project has adopted the same educator development process that Toyota (a similar project based near Durban) has used successfully.

The Project has made extensive use of the expertise of other ZCBF projects, which offer specialist services namely:

1. CASME Resource Centre (loans kits necessary in conducting scientific experiments; conducts professional development in natural sciences; helps with the scientific aspects of the school audit)
2. The University of Zululand Science Centre encourages children to cultivate a positive attitude towards science subjects through interactive displays and conducting fascinating and fun-filled workshops with students and educators.
3. The Zululand Career and Lifeskills Learning Centre provides career guidance and counselling on various issues; psychometric testing; works closely with CASME Resource Centre and Unizul Science Centre to instil in children the importance of continuing studies in the area of maths and science).
4. Ethembeni Care Centre trains teachers on how to create awareness among people about the HIV/AIDS pandemic tactfully and ways of offering basic counselling to students affected by the disease.

Adaptations for Replication:

Although the project cannot claim to have been duplicated elsewhere, similar projects being undertaken in other areas and efforts are made to network and learn from each another. The main suggestion in terms of possible replication would be to work with fewer schools at one time in order to reach a point where the schools can once again be completely self-sufficient. This would enable a closer relationship between the project manager and the principal of each school.

Key Dates

1. Early 1997 Surveys conducted to identify the beneficiary schools
2. September 1997 Development planning with schools
3. September 1998 Computer equipment donated to schools
4. October 1999 First learner bursary given to PEN Scholars
5. August 2000 Initiative recognised by provincial government (PEDU)

References

1. Winter school warmly welcomed Dave Savides
The Zululand Observer
23 July 2001
2. ZCBF role model educates Gauteng teachers Mandy Whyman

The Zululand Observer
31 May 2001

3. Billiton funds award winner The Zululand Observer
14 May 2001
Page 1

4. Making education accessible The Zululand Observer
4 May 2001

5. Technology centre - first for Zululand Candice Murgatroyd
The Zululand Observer
9 April 2001

6. R1 million for PENCIL schools Candice Murgatroyd
The Zululand Observer
6 April 2001

7. PEN School Project wins award KZN Industrial and Business News
Feb/Mar 2001

8. Business and Education work together The Zululand Observer
23 March 2001

9. Education heads visit ZCBF The Zululand Observer
12 March 2001

10. Teacher training Mandy Whyman
The Zululand Observer
22 January 2001

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Type of Organization: Community-based organisation (CBO)

Nominating Organization

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Type of Organization: Non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Partners

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Type of Organization: Para-statal

Financial Profile

| Year | Total Budget (US\$) | Partner A: ZCBF (<i>% of the budget</i>) | Partner B: Billiton Aluminium (<i>% of the budget</i>) | Partner C: Dept. of Education (<i>% of the budget</i>) |
|------|---------------------|--|--|--|
| 1998 | 90,000 | - | 100% | - |
| 1999 | 130,500 | - | 100% | - |
| 2000 | 130,500 | - | 100% | - |

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