The May Gathering report: Changemaker Towns Network

19 May 2022

The 'May Gathering' for the Changemaker Towns Network was convened by the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP), In Transformation Initiative, Citeplan/ Restaurare, Democracy Works, Ranyaka and Kagiso Trust. A diverse group of over 80 people from across South Africa joined, including changemakers from local partnerships, CEO's, researchers, mayors, and residents.

Highlights included:
- 'Popcorn' updates by changemakers and local partnerships from Cederberg, Paarl, Oudtshoorn, Mount Frere and Accountability Lab
- Launch of support tools – Interactive Map, Offers and Needs catalogue and research repository (uKESA)
- Guidance on enabling township economies of small towns, from a study of Rammulotsi (Viljoenskroon) in the northern Free State.
- Small Towns Regeneration Strategy process and updates on the strategy from the Department of Cooperative Governance (CoGTA)

A recording of the full session is available in the Changemaker Towns Network online folder for those who missed it.

1) Welcome and Introduction

The participants entered the meeting to the strains of the Ndlovu Youth Choir, who themselves herald from the South African small town of Moutse in Limpopo.

EDP CEO Andrew Boraine gave a brief background to the EDP and the Changemaker Towns Network, which has grown in membership from 100 to almost 200 participants since its launch in March. As a public benefit collaborative intermediary organisation, the EDP helps government and non-state actors work together to achieve development outcomes.

Andrew highlighted how many towns and regions in South Africa are struggling, economically, politically, and institutionally: "It's easy to feel a bit overwhelmed. It's hard to know where to start. Fortunately, there are people leading change in some areas. They come from the community, civil society, business, academics and researchers, and government. These are the changemakers. This Network is to help amplify their stories, learn from their initiatives, and build support for change."

The purpose of the Changemaker Towns Network is to support positive change in non-metro areas through:
- Information and knowledge sharing – stories of change processes, socio-economic trends, policy positions, resource, and support opportunities, etc
- Peer to peer learning – towns learning from each other about what works, what doesn't
- Partnering and collaboration lessons, methodologies, and frameworks.

The Network brings together five categories of participants each with different experiences and approaches towards driving change:
1) **Changemakers -** including practitioners, implementers, negotiators, activators
2) **Researchers** in rural, regional, and small-town economies and social and environmental conditions
3) **Policy makers** - including CoGTA's Small Town Regeneration Strategy, SALGA
4) **Support organisations and networks**
5) **Storytellers** – including journalists, film makers, artists.

2) Popcorn Updates: Changemaking initiatives on the ground
Below are snapshot summaries of speaker's inputs and links to presentations, where available.

ChangemakersHub, Cederberg
Presenter: Michelle Korevaar, Founder

The ChangemakersHub blueprint for change aims to create cross-sectoral collaboration around circular economies that leave tangible and scalable results: "We want to create capacity and ensure by the time we leave we have something to share". ChangemakersHub is currently working in Clanwilliam and has a Memorandum of Understanding with Cederberg Municipality.

So far, ChangemakersHub has had significant achievements, outlined in the slide below, and will be expanding to other areas in the district, including Lamberts Bay and Graafwater. The objective is to develop an agency that raises resources and promotes partnerships between government, private sector, civil society, and other actors that contribute to environmental protection and sustainability.

Above: ChangemakersHub key success areas.

Beauty of Nature – Mbekweni
Presenter: Siyabonga Stengana, Founder

Illegal dumping in townships is a huge problem in the Western Cape, which Beauty of Nature founder Siyabonga sought to address by converting these areas into productive spaces, with an emphasis on youth activities. There are now 40 spaces in Mbekweni, Paarl, and a branch in Langa, Cape Town. Beauty of Nature cleans, refurbishes, and activates these spaces towards income generating activities, which range from a carwash, a 'tshisa nyama' (outlet selling braaied meat) to 'hydro-dipping' art done on sneakers. These activities help to sustain their initiatives, while they rely on donations of paint and brushes from the community. With the unemployment crisis in South Africa, the emphasis on youth activities ensures that youth have the opportunity to contribute in their neighbourhood. See this Business Insider [article](#) (13 February 2022) on Beauty of Nature's initiatives.

Above: A street corner in Mbekweni, Paarl after a clean up and revamp by Beauty of Nature. Credit: Siyabonga Stengana

Above: The simple addition of painted tyres allowed school learners to appreciate the space near their school. Credit: Siyabonga Stengana

Accountability Lab - Integrity Icons campaign

Presenter: Sekoetlane Phamodi

Accountability Lab is running the Integrity Icon campaign, which aims to 'name and fame' local public servants in small towns and communities. In South Africa, the focus is commonly on what is wrong rather than the positive work done by public servants in resource-constrained areas. To counter this, the Integrity Icon celebrates 'what is strong, not what is wrong'. Network participants are encouraged to nominate a public servant in their town so that they can be recognised for their work.

Real Life Commit - Oudtshoorn

Presenter: Susanna Spires

Real Life Commit is an NPO based in Oudtshoorn which offers e-learning courses and life skills for disabled and unemployed youth, which aim to build the self-confidence of the disabled and help them take their place in the economy of our land. They want the vulnerable people to become self-sustaining by giving them the necessary skills to empower them to start their own businesses. See video from leader Susanna Spires describing their work.

Bhaca Environmental Justice Movement - Mount Mrere

Presenter: Bongiwe Mafunya

Bhaca works on land rehabilitation, clearing alien invasive species and turning this biomass into a product such as biochar. The organisation is wanting to expand to other products. Bhaca is also raising environmental awareness in schools and involving youth in regenerative agriculture and livestock stewardship.

Ranyaka – Proud of my Town initiative

Presenter: Peter Ahmad

Ranyaka's 'Proud of my Town' initiative, which aims towards holistic community transformation, was launched in 2016 and forms part of Nedbank's ongoing commitment to the well-being and positive socio-economic development of all South Africans. Ten 'Proud of my Town' initiatives and related details have been mapped on the Changemaker Towns Network interactive map.

Above: Screenshot of video showcasing Ranyaka's Proud of my Town initiative.

3) Outcomes of Popcorn Updates

The following themes emerged from the Popcorn Updates:

- A town is not just a collection of buildings, it is the people of the town that are key, and how people work together that drives change. Citizens are taking action about basic things like cleaning up and addressing issues of poverty and local economic development: how do we build an enabling environment for citizen action? – **Andrew Boraine, EDP**
- While many initiatives may be short term, the ability of the various players to work within the limitations without waiting for the 'big fix' approach is truly remarkable. In the longer term, the community should steer the ship and take initiative, and we need to foster and develop ownership. City plans are always centred around the Integrated Development Plan and the Municipal Spatial Development Frameworks, which are important, but cannot be the heartbeat of community initiatives - **Peter Ahmad, Ranyaka**
- When talking about inclusivity, the circular economy needs to be challenged from a theoretical perspective. Paying micro entrepreneurs for their recycled materials is empowering for them as they do not rely on government support. In ChangemakerHub's work, the same applies to backyard food gardens, encouraging communities to utilise their limited space to grow their own vegetables which also holds a strong empowerment element – **Michelle Korevaar, ChangemakersHub**

4) Launch of Support tools

The EDP has launched 4 exciting support tools to support the Changemaker Towns Network, available to all members:

- The Changemaker Towns Network database (due to privacy concerns this is not yet 'open access'. Please contact Phefumlela should you wish to be connected with someone on the database).
- The Offers and Needs Catalogue
- An Interactive Map
- A Research database on the uKESA platform for the network members to utilize for partnership building, vertical and horizontal learning exchange, skills transfer, and research (details to follow).

To be included on the Interactive Map, please share a brief description of your initiative with Phefumlela (email phefumlela@wcedp.co.za).

The 'Connections Carnival' - applications open for micro-grants

The Changemaker Towns Network is looking for changemaker-led events that highlight the local assets of a town through the 'what is strong rather than what is wrong': an asset-based citizen-led development (ABCD) approach. The event can be alongside existing festivals or events, or it can be a new idea that contributes towards partnering. The Network is offering micro-grants for changemakers wishing to catalyse action and partnering in their own towns through a project or festival and will also be offering remote partnering support, where possible. Find out more and apply.

5) Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees and Karoo Karte
Presenters: Vaughn Sadie (Karoo Karte), Hugo Theart (KKNK)

The Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK) started three decades ago in Oudtshoorn, as an economic injection for the town. It has built a reputation as an artistic hub and one of the largest arts festivals in South Africa. The festival has had a positive economic impact with a boost of over R53 million to Oudtshoorn and R178 million to the Western Cape.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced KKNK to re-evaluate their impact and approach, acknowledging the tremendous impact that art can have on a town. All festivals came to a standstill, and instead the Klein Karoo Arts Academy project was birthed, with the main objective to build social cohesion and change society through the arts.

Through collaboration, KKNK commissioned 'Karoo Karte', a community-led festival project, started in August 2021, with the first phase presented at the festival in March 2022. The main objective was to show how projects like this can create employment opportunities, skills transfer and for residents to take ownership. The project showed a lot of potential, and drew sponsorships. The project methodology could expand to other towns, if more funding is secured.

Klein Karoo Arts Academy: Experiences of participants and local community members
Presenters: Glenisha Tarentaal, Tiffany Saterdaght

For Glenisha, a project leader and researcher at the Klein Karoo Arts Academy the Karoo Karte opened her mind to growing as an individual and the process of gathering the stories of people in her community made her realize that all their struggles and traumas were the same. This made her realize healing from her traumas was her responsibility and urged others to do the same. The stories shared by community members highlighted the positive activities happening in their community.

Tiffany, a project researcher, poet, playwright, and aspiring theatre director spoke about the project's future. Karoo Karte created employment opportunities and skills development opportunities for people of the town, and with the right funding, the project could contribute to the financial growth of Oudtshoorn. Culturally, there remains huge potential – the festival assisted in uncovering some of the town's stories but there remains a long way to go. is the arts provide a platform which can be used to uncover these stories and preserve the town's culture.

6) "Town + township" Integrated development in small towns: towards a how-to guide

Presenter: Professor Frederick Fourie, Centre for Development Support, University of Free State.
Full presentation is available here.

Professor Fourie shared a Centre for Development Support study on the economy of Rammulotsi, a township within the small town of Viljoenskroon, in northern Free State. Unemployment, poverty, and inequality exists in every town in South Africa and any efforts aimed at regeneration, job creation and income growth in a town must include the township economy, much of which operates informally.

Findings of the study revealed that the estimated total expenditure of Rammulotsi households was R31.5 million per month, which is a significant component of the town's economy. Learning from this case study, the informal sector is larger than it is generally understood to be. However, the informal sector is ignored by many economic policy documents and businesspeople due to the sector being perceived as being made up of street traders and waste pickers. Fourie said that those in the informal sector are often seen as merely "survivalist without entrepreneurial ambitions".

Townships should therefore be part of any small-town regeneration strategies. While the study shows that the picture of the informal sector is incorrect, these enterprises are seedling enterprises which find themselves in a vulnerable space due to economic policy exclusions. The informal sector in fact is as diverse as the formal sector and comprises of all industries found in the 'normal' economy profile. The challenge is to design, fund and successfully implement appropriate policy and direct interventions at a local level.

Frederick introduced the 'how to guide' of interventions that can be used to boost township economies to increase employment, income, and regeneration. It is paramount that one must get information on the township economy, including enterprises, employment, expenditure, and especially the linkages to the 'town' economy.

Above: Presentation slide on Prof Frederick Fourie's start to a 'how to guide' on 'Town + township' Integrated development in small towns.

7) Local radical collaboration as a key enabler of socio-economic development, Kagiso Trust

Presenter: Paul Smith
Full presentation available [here](#).

Paul shared some insights on radical collaboration being a key enabler of socio-economic development. He indicated that it is important to change people's perceptions and to come together for a common cause which uses collective knowledge and creates solutions to complex societal issues. The consequences of limited collaboration are rife in South Africa which limits collective impact.

Above: Slide from presentation by Paul Smith showing the consequences of limited collaboration and how it translates on society.

The polarised stakeholder environment we operate in means that applying a simple solution will not work seeing that our problems are complex. Not talking or listening to one another will not assist in devising solutions to our problems hence spaces like the Changemaker Towns Network could elevate the quality of our thinking in resolving societal issues. It is paramount that we connect – fix relationships (communities, public and private sector) before solving issues for impact.

8) Update on the Small Towns Regeneration Programme - Department of Cooperative Governance

Presenter: Prabin Govender, Urban Development Policy, Department of Cooperative Governance
Full presentation available here

Prabin provided an update on the implementation process of the Small Towns Regeneration Strategy (STR). The STR was launched on the 28 February 2022 by Deputy Minister Thembisile Nkadimeng. There are two approaches to the STR: the regionalist approach, being the group of towns functioning together, and the town-based approach, focusing on the upliftment of that small town. The Department of Cooperative Governance (CoGTA) is leading the implementation of the STR, building partnerships, ensuring the integration of the STR with existing government programmes and creating an enabling mechanism for communities to participate.

Within government structures, the Department will provide the municipality with support, raise awareness of the STR, and look at the use of existing resources. The role of the small-town municipality is critical, and for the STR the municipality needs to take the lead to work with communities and the private sector. There are three pilot towns: Modimolle in Limpopo, Piketberg in Western Cape, and Senekal/Matwabeng in Free State, which will assist in the learning and improvement of the strategy. The STR is a unique strategy because it can be initiated by the community which can then call on the municipality to collaborate to realize what they want to achieve.

Above: Slide from Prabin Govender's update about CoGTA's Small Town Regeneration strategy.

9) Take home points

Andrew Boraine (EDP) concluded the session with some points to reflect on and support action towards regeneration of small towns:

- When talking about the building blocks of change, you cannot just focus on the tangible aspects like clean ups and jobs, you also must deal with the collective traumas which are still raw, issues of culture as well wanting to belong and not belonging; the way in which people engage with one another is critical in the change process.
- How we show up and work with one another is echoed in work done around enabling people to connect, communicate, and collaborate. We should not start debating issues until we find some form of connection and relationship.
- Every town should have a strategy to sustain, support and enable the informal economy in the broader sense and not just the waste pickers and traders.
- There is a need for engagements outside the full Network meetings focusing on the informal sector. The initial engagement could focus on partnering and changemaking methodologies and how we can mobilise people to work together.