

“It’s not a project, it’s a way of life” Interview with Colisile Tfwala on engaging businesses for local sustainability

Ms Tfwala, how is the city of Mbabane creating an enabling environment for local economic development?

Some people have the misconception that local economic development is a project. But for Mbabane, one of the main things we had to get right from the start was to make sure that everything we do is contributing towards sustainable development of the locality,

“There has to be stakeholder engagement in absolutely everything we do.”

which means social inclusion, which means protection of the environment, which means job creation.

Another thing is that there has to be stakeholder engagement in our policies and strategies and absolutely everything we do, including by-laws. The local authority does not just decide that this is what we are going to do. In order to ensure that the environment is enabling, we have to ask the people how they feel something has to be done. And we have to involve the people in the implementation of whatever policy or whatever strategy, and even in the monitoring, so that there is constant engagement between the city council and the people. That also includes the communities, businesses and civil society organisations, absolutely every stakeholder that is involved.

Did the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs have an impact on your existing strategies?

I wish I could say yes, but unfortunately, at the time when we were putting in place our strategies, the Agenda 2030 had not been adopted yet. But fortunately now, we are about to finalise our new strategy. We are putting in place a new integrated development plan which is the overall strategy of the organisation,

but we are also putting in place a new local economic development strategy. That basically means that, at least, we are having some sort of a fresh start. The beauty of it is that we have ensured that the integrated development plan and the local economic development strategy are focussed on the SDGs. This means that for everything we are going to do, whatever plan, whatever activity, we ask how it is contributing towards the attainment of the SDGs. So we have had a chance to redo it, get it right and focus correctly.

“For everything we are going to do, we ask how it is contributing towards the SDGs.”

You are working together with different communities. How does their participation look like in practice?

Policies and strategies have to be formulated with the communities. So when you start, start engaging them right from the planning! When you implement, it is easier for the communities when they have buy-in, because it is from them. In the past, we were just providing services, and there was this animosity between the civil society and the council, the local authority. But now, the consultation starts right from the planning level and this is really helping civil society to come on board.

“Engage communities right from the planning!”

And it is the same thing with businesses. We have business forums, where there are businesses who say what we are doing right as a municipality and where we fail to ensure an enabling environment. They tell us and we go back and correct and then we come back

again and report to the businesses. And for things where we have no control over, where the responsibility is with the national government, we engage with the national government.

“Constant communication really helps in this partnership.”

If we fail as a municipality, we will say we have tried but we failed, we come back and report. So we find that that engagement, that constant communication really helps in this partnership because there is no way there can be local economic development without proper partnership with all stakeholders on the ground.

What would be your advice to cities that just start working on sustainable economic development?

“Local economic development is about sustainability, so it is holistic.”

One thing I would say is that cities should always remember that local economic development is not a project, it is not a once off thing, because that's not sustainable. Local economic development is about sustainability, so it is holistic, it is absolutely everything that you do as a local authority, so your mind-set has to change. When you are planning to attract a company to the locality, for example, you have to consider how that will impact on skills transfer, on job creation, how you can ensure that the locality

remains sustainable in the long term – even if this company then leaves the locality. So it is absolutely a massive shift in approach, it has to become the way of life of the municipality.

“It is a massive shift in approach.”

And if there is a project, there has to be a resource driving the local economic development, and that resource has to sit in the highest executive office – in that way decisions are made faster. Because when you are dealing with businesses, you have to understand that businesses act faster than governments or national governments, things have to happen in time when there are opportunities, otherwise these opportunities are going to be lost. So you need to deal with businesses in that space and in understanding of how they work.

Colisile Tfwala

Colisile Tfwala has worked in the Economic Development field for more than seven years. She is currently a Senior Manager in charge of the Local Economic Development Programme of the Municipal Council of Mbabane, the capital City of Eswatini (Swaziland). Her job entails creating an enabling environment in the City to ensure job creation, poverty alleviation and sustainable development, through collaborating with different stakeholders.



Imprint

The Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. It is a cross-party and non-profitmaking organisation. sef: provides an international high-level forum for shared thinking on the complex challenges of globalisation..

sef: insight is an online publication to accompany key conferences hosted by sef:. It presents interviews with international experts as well as opinion pieces on pressing issues of local, regional and global governance.

Published by
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:)
Dechenstr. 2 | 53115 Bonn | Germany
Phone +49 (0)228 959 25-0 | Fax -99
sef@sef-bonn.org | @sefbonn
www.sef-bonn.org

Editors
Dr Mischa Hansel,
Dr Michèle Roth

Design Basic Concept
Pitch Black Graphic Design
Berlin/Rotterdam

Layout
Gerhard Suess-Jung

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.

ISSN 2566-7262
© sef: 2018