

Fighting poverty vs. fighting gender equality – the daily though choices we have to make

Vuvulane town board



Fact box

COUNTRY	Swaziland
COUNCIL	Vuvulane
WHY SELECTED	Worse case - struggling
Score when score card first administered	30.4 % (Count only the relevant 25 questions)
Agreed score at summit/during verification	39 % (New score card)
Population	4155
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community is poverty stricken • Gender issues not high on the agenda of the council due to cultural beliefs in the council and community • Gender champions are not as active because of their varying cultural beliefs • Internal politics affecting the work on the ground around gender issues
Contact person	Lomcebo Dlamini
Designation	Councillor
Contact details	

What was the situation before the intervention?

The community of Vuvulane is stricken by poverty and has often been said to resemble a refugee camp. Although the town is known for its sugar cane farming, none of the houses in the town are owned by the people living there but instead by the sugar cane farmers who do not even live in Vuvulane. The area has one primary and high school but none of the farm labourers has any of their kids attending school due to the lack of financial resources. Such idleness among the youth and lack of productive activity result in the birth and rise of petty crimes in the compounds. So the residents of the community are daily struggling to make ends meet.

How has life tangibly and demonstrably changed as a result of the intervention?

Although there was initially high levels of buy-in from councillors an management of the council into the COE process, the daily struggles of live for those living in Vuvulane overshadowed the vision of the COE model and gender mainstreaming has now had to take a back seat. Currently the council is struggling because of lack of resources as it depends on government subsidies to function therefore there is insufficient funding for gender issues.

The council has however completed some of the various training and capacity building modules of the COE model and even has a gender action plan and although the council is struggling to implement its gender action plan, to date the council has managed to host community sensitisation workshops on issues of Human Rights and Gender Based Violence. In terms of Local Economic Development, the council has built a market which is mostly used by women. The council managed has partnered with SEDCO (Small Enterprises Development Company Limited) for capacity building and the training is open to both males and females, but there are more women than men.

How do we know this change has occurred?

Currently there is no gender balance in the council, although in 2011 the council managed to recruit one female staff member. There are three males and one female councillors, and five men and one woman in the management team and there are three females and three males labourers.

What are the characteristics of this group that distinguish it from the others?

Although The CEO and the Mayor are the selected gender champions for the COE process in the council – due to different cultural believes gender issues are not going down well with men in the community. The leadership of Vuvulane suppresses the issue of gender; and there is particularly no support on issues of GBV. Recently the council was forced to change focal persons as pervious focal person (Lomcebo Dlamini who was interviewed in this case study) was not effective. So the need for capacity building for the gender focal person and gender champions in Vuvulane is great. Vuvulane demonstrates the importance of looking at the gender dynamics of cultural and if there is no platform for engagement not only the council, but the greater community will suffer and in a country like Swaziland, these issues cannot go unnoticed because it is at the level of the COE council, the local level, the level closest to the people that issues of culture are most real.

What is it about this group that creates barriers to accessing benefits?

One of the key issues that GL has encountered through working with the council is that women are not aware on issues of gender and more specifically women are not aware of

their rights. Women are slowly adopting gender as an issue of both males and females though their thinking is that men still lead of which women are still suppressed, this pushing up the level of GBV in Vuvulane. Women are afraid to attend community meetings on gender because they fear their realities when going back to their homes. So the need for more SADC Protocol Village Level workshops in Vuvulane is much greater.

Like for all other COE councils, the issue of finance has been a challenge as the council could not implement some of the envisioned activities. The council relies on the Ministry of Housing for funding and a key challenge for the council is that even if there are tenders the Ministry controls it, except for small tenders like stationery and cleaning materials.

What changes in intervention design might or have been made to increase these benefits?

There is a definite need for more training and capacity building, not only of the council but also the community at least given the influence that culture has on people's understanding of gender. There is also a need for more work on understanding GBV - people do not have enough information and access to information is limited in Vuvulane.



Vuvulane is also proves that if the gender focal person - in many councils across Swaziland it is the AMICALL programme managers – does not anchor gender issues, no implementation will happen of even the most basic activities in action plans like community meetings under trees, that can change the live of one person.