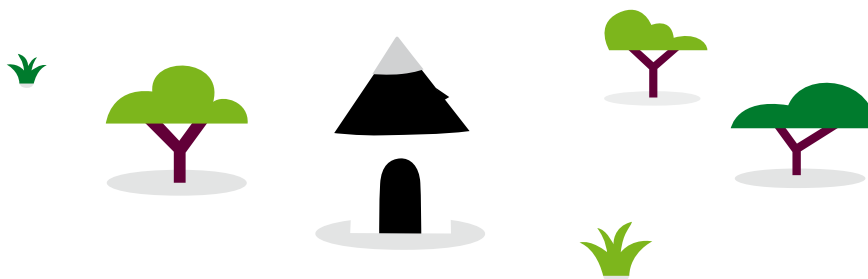


STORIES OF CHANGE

THROUGH THE AUSTRALIA AFRICA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCHEME (AACES)



www.oxfam.org.au





Yolanda Dlamini, who goes to Woza Moya
playschool, uses a tippy tap to wash her hands.
PHOTO © Max Bastard / Oxfam

CREDITS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AACES	Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme
DoSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early childhood development
OVSA	OneVoice South Africa
SC	Save the Children
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WECDF	Wentworth Early Childhood Development Forum

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FOREWORD

BY THE AUTHOR, KRISTINA GUBIC

As a storyteller, it is a delicate responsibility to step into the space of a development organisation that has a long established track record with a particular community and understands its challenges well.

As outside observers, we are essentially looking through a pinhole. This narrow slice of time offers neither perspective nor history into the journey of what might already have been accomplished, or what reflection has already been undertaken to determine the best future path.

When we drop in as development practitioners, evaluators, media or potential partners, we see only the present moment. But the same apparent limitation can sometimes result in a fresh pair of eyes identifying aspects that those familiar with a project may not see. Insiders are often unable to see how far they have come, but an outsider's perspective can shed light on achievements.

It is in the spirit of learning and positive transformation that these observations and insights are shared; to not only celebrate the great work being done at grassroots by so many committed individuals who typically lack the time and resources to toot their own horn, but to also reveal new and innovative ways of improving the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Social development is becoming an increasingly complex field where the most fundamental act of human compassion is at risk of being drowned out by a move towards more sophisticated and academic approaches of measuring impact through endless checklists, indicators and frameworks.

In our pursuit for sustainability, it is our role as storytellers to not lose sight of the human stories. By giving a voice to the people on the ground, we convey an authenticity that cannot be portrayed through spreadsheets of data, but instead gives meaning to the individuality of a place and the relationships of trust built over time that have enabled change to happen.

I am immensely grateful for the privilege of being able to step inside the space of development organisations and their people who have entrusted me to tell their stories, and for the many inspiring conversations that have deepened my understanding and overturned assumptions.

THE AUSTRALIA AFRICA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCHEME

The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) is a collaborative partnership between Oxfam Australia's Southern Africa office and a group of South African-based organisations working at a grassroots level to affect social change.

The breadth of issues these organisations tackle is diverse and includes health, sustainable livelihoods which typically involves food security and income-generating activities, early childhood development (ECD), water, sanitation and health (WASH) and empowering people with disabilities.

These organisations work at achieving social justice for communities that ensure vulnerable groups such as children, women and people with disabilities are aware of their human rights and given the knowledge and capacity to articulate their place in society and engage stakeholders to ensure accountability.

What makes these organisations valuable and effective are the relationships they have built over time with their communities, gaining trust and working to understand the social issues and collectively working to craft solutions. Each approach is unique and appropriate to the needs of the people they serve, making them relevant, locally owned and truly sustainable.

The AACES collaboration makes for a unique cross-sharing platform, where each partner is recognised for their individual expertise and is able to share and reflect on this with other partners across the network. This has resulted in a cohesive group that works across a region, building communities of practice in social development and providing possibilities of scale across Southern Africa that promises real positive transformation for the region.



Excel Nursery School,
Wentworth WASH program.
PHOTO © Matthew Willman / Oxfam

THE CONTEXT

The AACES partners in South Africa are based in KwaZulu-Natal, the eastern most province of South Africa, with the Indian Ocean to the east and the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg mountains to the west.

The region has a rich biodiversity that represents 11 ecosystems and includes two World Heritage Sites, the isiMangaliso Wetland Park encompassing 332,000 hectares of fresh water lakes, coastal dunes and sand forest savannah, and the Ukhahlamba (meaning 'Barrier of Spears') mountain range, which forms an impenetrable wall of granite that stretches 150km and separates South Africa from Lesotho.

These natural features are significant when considering the state of water and sanitation in KwaZulu-Natal. They provide an ecological insight into the available natural resources that contain four of the largest freshwater catchments, out of South Africa's total of 19. The Southern Drakensberg catchment includes the longest free-flowing river, the Mkomasi, and the Zululand coastal catchment includes KwaZulu-Natal's biggest river, the Thukela. Several dams and bulk water transfer schemes, including Jozini, Sterkfontein, Midmar and Albert Falls dams, are examples of infrastructure designed to reduce variances between flood and drought cycles and support service delivery to human settlements and industry. The reality on the ground, however, is very different.

While the government of South Africa has made massive strides since 1994 in erasing the backlog entrenched by apartheid, the latest service delivery statistics are misleading. According to the latest General Household Survey¹ conducted in 2012, 90.8% of households have access to piped water. But the South African Human Rights Commission in a 2014 report on water and sanitation² stated that 85% of citizens only have access to a shared standpipe that is less than 200 metres away, as regarded as acceptable levels of water in the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The disparity becomes clearer when examining figures in the poorer provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal where 14.1% of residents still have no access to piped water and the Eastern Cape where 12.5% of residents have never had access to any form of sanitation.

For the rural and widely dispersed communities of KwaZulu-Natal, decentralised water infrastructure remains their only option because it is not cost-effective for bulk infrastructure to reach them. Culturally, these communities remain deeply traditional and a strongly embedded patriarchal structure means that the burden of collecting water and firewood typically falls on the shoulders of women and girls.

The gender bias means that women and girls are held back from school and from participating in other economic activities because of the hours diverted to ensuring that about 60 to 100 litres of water is collected each day to meet the most basic of needs such as drinking, washing and cooking. Where there are no protected water points such as boreholes and covered wells, the exposure to water-borne diseases is prolific as communities and livestock are forced to share the same contaminated source.

1 www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182012.pdf

2 <http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/index.php?ipkContentID=88>

Local government administration in South Africa is decentralised with each of the nine provinces operating autonomously. Each province is divided into district municipalities that are further divided into local municipalities. The mandate and budgets to install, upgrade and maintain infrastructure such as water and sanitation are allocated by treasury at national level, but implemented at local level. The matter is further complicated by the fact that all district municipalities receive their budgets from a national allocation that uses the natural water catchments as its demarcation. Since these catchments often traverse provincial boundaries, it becomes challenging to share budgets across provinces and achieve regional cooperation.

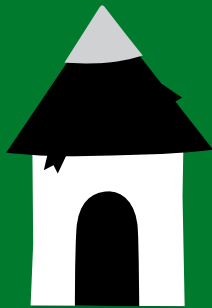
The National Development Plan³, which was intended to be a roadmap for the country's economic growth and social development, suggests a strong bias towards economic imperatives where the exploitation of mineral resources will be prioritised and job creation through further urban development and dedicated industrial zones could mean perpetuating the service delivery backlog in rural areas that do not have significant mineral deposits.

³ www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030



STORIES OF AACES PARTNERS:

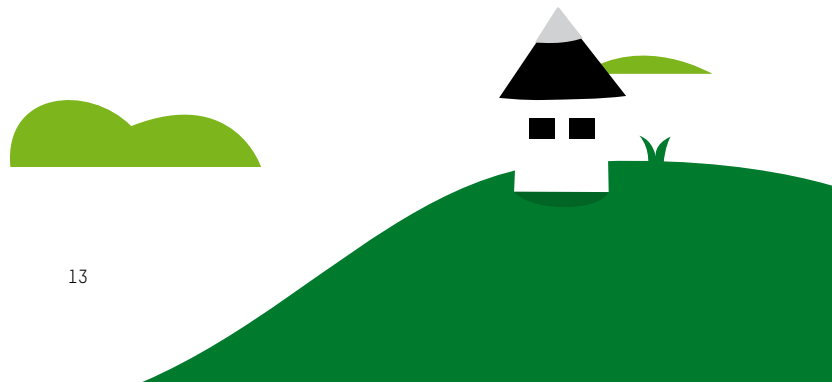
WOZA MOYA



“Where you stand the grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. But the rich green hills break down. They fall to the valley below, and falling, change their nature. For they grow red and bare; they cannot hold the rain and mist, and the streams are dry in the kloofs. Too many cattle feed upon the grass, and too many fires have burned it...Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man. They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more.”

The landscape of the Ufafa Valley is not very different from when Alan Paton first described it in his 1948 novel *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Decades of migrant labour that pulled men away from their families to mine gold in Johannesburg has left its scars. The legacy of apartheid favoured development of urban centres and wealthy farms, leaving the traditional homelands behind. Held back by the absence of life-giving infrastructure like water, electricity, schools and clinics, 20 years of democracy has not yet managed to erase the backlog of the previous 50 years.

When Sue Hedden first began working in the area in 1999, she found a rural community deeply affected by poverty and HIV and AIDS. Stigma within the community made prevention and awareness-raising difficult and few people sought treatment or spoke about their illness. Fifteen years on, the community-based organisation of Woza Moya has become a vital force for community cohesion and development. Their ongoing efforts continue to build relationships with the community and empower people by passing on knowledge and skills that continue to transform lives.



What began as an urgent intervention to provide home-based care has systematically evolved into a more holistic offering that is improving health, supporting sustainable livelihoods through food security and craft projects, strengthening social justice for those who may not be aware of their rights and providing access to education for ECD.

The lack of access to safe water and sanitation in the community has been an ongoing threat to the progress made. While service delivery remains poor in the area, Woza Moya has provided a source of inspiration through the practical demonstration of various water harvesting and conservation techniques that can be implemented at village and household level. The Woza Moya centre now has its own rain water harvesting system that diverts water to several large storage tanks capable of holding up to 30,000 litres during peak rainfall periods. Grey water is separated and gravity-fed to nourish the terraced food gardens below and a row of tippy taps⁴ encourage young learners attending the crèche to wash their hands regularly.

With few working water points in the area and the community forced to draw water from natural springs and streams, water-borne illnesses are widespread. In 2013, with the support of Oxfam Australia's Southern Africa office, Woza Moya was able to expand its offering by providing WASH education to its neighbouring communities.

Already, the outreach conducted by their community caregivers is making inroads and changing behaviour to encourage better health and hygiene and make people more aware of the risks of unsafe water sources. Simple low-tech, affordable solutions that can be implemented at household level are also being taken up and the reduction in water-borne illnesses is testimony to its impact.

⁴ A tippy tap is a simple and hygienic device to wash hands with soap and running water. For information see www.tippytops.org.

SOCIAL BAROMETER OF UBUHLEBEZWE

The communities in which Woza Moya operates form part of the Ubuhlebezwe Municipality, one of five regions that make up the Sisonke District in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Cradled between the the Umkomazi and Umzimkulu rivers, the area is predominantly rural. A total of 74.2% of the population live on traditional land, 11.5% of the land is regarded as urban and the remaining 14.3% is agricultural.

According to the latest figures provided by Statistics SA⁵, there are 23,487 households with an average of four people per household. The official rate of unemployment among youth aged between 18 and 35 years of age is reported to be 42%, with a high dependency on social grants. General information about social grants shows that 23% of the grants issued in South Africa are issued in KwaZulu-Natal.⁶

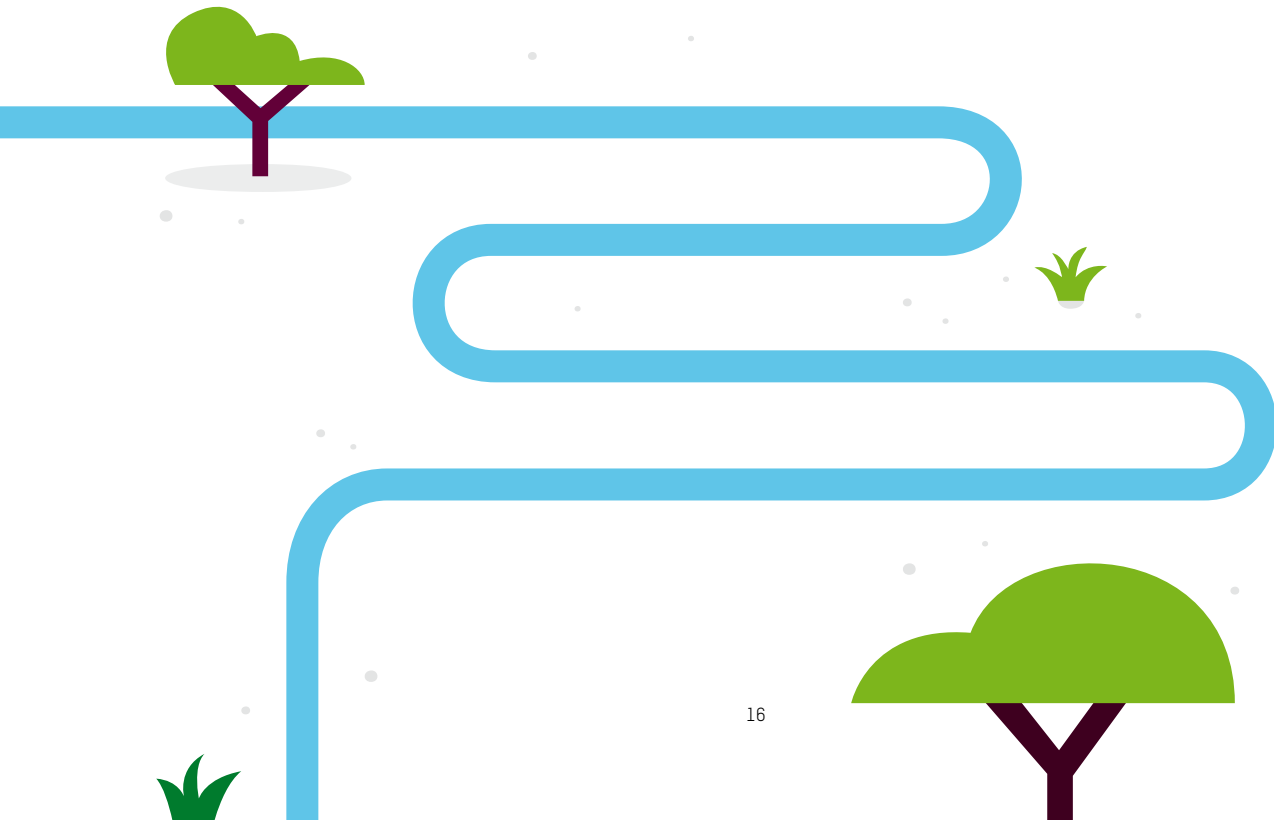
Only 12,4% of households, mostly in urban areas, have access to piped water inside their homes, with the majority of rural people forced to rely on boreholes, water tanks and community taps that can be one to two kilometres away from their home. Communities are equally dependent on several natural springs that rely on groundwater recharge and sufficient rain, while the mountainous terrain also encourages runoff into several natural streams that do not always flow throughout the year. In some instances, communities have built shallow earth dams adjacent to springs, exposing their water sources to outside contamination from livestock.

5 www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=ubuhlebezwe-municipality

6 www.sassa.gov.za/index.php/knowledge-centre/statistical-reports?start=30

Access to proper sanitation is even lower, with 12% of the region having access to a flush toilet connected to a sewage system and the majority relying on pit latrines. The steep terrain poses problems when latrines that have not emptied or rehabilitated for many years, overflow in the rainy season, washing effluent into the open watersheds and exposing the community to water-borne diseases.

Although 53.9% of households are reported to be electrified, mainly for lighting, few rural households can afford the municipal connection fee and continue to use firewood and paraffin in their homes for cooking, heating and lighting.



UBUHLEBEZWE

POPULATION

101,691

HOUSEHOLDS

23,487



UNEMPLOYMENT
34.0%



UNEMPLOYMENT (18-35YRS)
42.1%



AGRICULTURAL
14.3%
URBAN
11.5%
RURAL
74.2%



PIPED WATER
12.4%



ELECTRICITY
53.9%



FLUSH TOILETS
12.0%



SCHOOLS
12



CLINICS
2

WATER POINT MAPPING SURVEY

In February 2013, Woza Moya's technical WASH team completed a survey of all the available water sources in the Ufafa Valley. Alan Hofland and Bheki Mchunu covered hundreds of square kilometres to spatially map the location of community taps, boreholes, springs and streams to improve Woza Moya's understanding of how and where communities access their water and to lay the foundation for future projects.

What began as a household survey that took Alan and Bheki door to door gave Woza Moya a valuable insight into how the community struggles to access water and has helped identify the most vulnerable areas. While the many conversations with the community have strengthened Woza Moya's understanding of the challenges, it was vital to be able to overlay these reports with actionable technical data that could help establish an informed plan to reach areas of priority that may be in need of repair, testing and urgent health intervention.

In a population of roughly 96,000 widely dispersed people, off-grid and decentralised water infrastructure has until now been the only viable way to get water to people in these remote areas. But the limitations on yield that often fluctuates with the seasons means that communities are not able to access a consistent supply, often restricting their activities to meet basic health and hygiene and not being able to collect enough water to sustain livelihoods or pursue economic activities like farming, baking or keeping livestock.



IMPACT ON EDUCATION

The Woza Moya team located 12 schools across the region that had no reliable water source inside the school grounds and typically relied on rain water harvesting to meet their needs. Some were equipped with government-funded storage tanks that would capture rainwater off their roofs, but in most cases, the gutters and pipes had fallen into disrepair and were no longer effective. In the case of Dingizwe Secondary School, no water at the school meant classes were frequently interrupted so that learners could collect enough water from nearby taps for drinking, cooking and washing hands. Woza Moya has since partnered with Dingizwe to provide storage tanks and WASH training and demonstrate good water management within a school. The school has reported increased attendance and health since the partnership began.

MOTIVATING GOVERNMENT

Local resident, Nomusa Nene chose to walk even further than necessary to collect water from the stream. She explains:

“The water from the taps is always brown and dirty because of the rusted pipes, so we rather take water from the stream and boil it for drinking or let it stand in the sun like Mrs Mkhize [a community care worker] showed us.”

News in remote communities travels fast and the survey had a motivating effect on government, which was evident in the mobilisation of teams to replace old corroded pipes and repair boreholes that were no longer functioning. Technical capacity and skills at local government level continue to be in short supply and this may explain the reluctance to move towards more innovative and renewable technologies.

FINDINGS FROM WOZA MOYA'S WATER POINT SURVEY



BOREHOLES

29



NATURAL SPRINGS

27



COMMUNAL TAPS

14



WATER TANKS

6



STREAMS

4

SOCIAL JUSTICE SAVING LIVES

S'bonelo Ndlovu is the Paralegal and Advocacy Manager at Woza Moya. His role is to help the most vulnerable members of the community identified by the community care workers to navigate the social development system. With low literacy levels, people often experience difficulty filling in the complex forms required to access social services. S'bonelo assists by taking them through the documents.

The South African government provides social grants to the country's most vulnerable in the form of a stipend, intended as a social safety net against poverty. For many of the older generation who may not have completed schooling, the business of applying for foster care grants to care for grandchildren left in their care or even registering the birth or death of a family member, can be overwhelming. Poverty also means little disposable income available to travel into town. Administrative matters are seldom solved quickly and sometimes an entire day can be spent in a government office without resolution. This can mean several costly trips before the matter is solved.

Thembi Mveli, Woza Moya's former Child and Youth Care Manager, was recently called to the home of a *gogo* (grandmother) in need of help. Her one daughter had recently passed away and left three children in the grandmother's care. Her second daughter, who had recently completed high school, had given birth to her first child days before. The *gogo* needed to give up her casual employment as a housekeeper, losing her only income, to care for her grandchildren.



From asking a few questions, Thembi discovers that none of the children were registered at birth and so, without a birth certificate, the *gogo* will be unable to apply for a foster care grant to support them. Thembi makes a mental note that the children need a health check and leaves the homestead. Her first action is to get a food parcel and interim support for the family, knowing it might take several months for birth certificates to be issued and care grants to be processed.

The *gogo* is one of many elderly people who must manage the daily burden of gathering firewood and fetching water. The children are too young to help with the household chores of fetching water in heavy buckets or to push a wheelbarrow from the nearest water point, and she must rely on the kindness of neighbours to help her.

Meanwhile, S'bonelo is involved in a lengthy engagement with government on when improved service delivery will be brought to the region. The answers do not come quickly and stakeholder meetings are held. In the meantime, water for washing, cooking and cleaning around the home, must be fetched from somewhere every day.





Mhlonishwa Dlamini collecting water.
PHOTO © Max Bastard / Oxfam

THE HUMAN TOLL OF DIRTY WATER

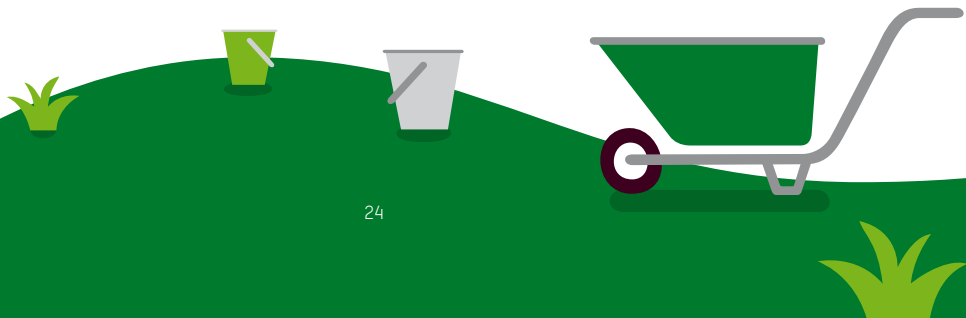
Unsafe water and water shortages take their toll in the Ufafa Valley, but with the help of education and support from Woza Moya’s community caregivers, people are learning new ways to manage with limited resources and improve the health of their families.

The gravel roads are a constant source of dust or mud, depending on the season, and wheelbarrows and wheelchairs do not last long. There is no piped water or sanitation in the area and water must be fetched, with most people having to walk up to one kilometre to find a working tap. If the taps are dry, people turn to the natural streams and springs.

For many reaching water means a steep climb down a dirt track to the river that is shared with livestock, before having to climb back up with a wheelbarrow loaded with up to three buckets weighing at least around 60 kilograms. For those who do not own a wheelbarrow, one bucket at a time must be carried up the hill until at least the most essential basic quota of 60 litres is collected. From this supply, a household of four people must drink, cook and bathe, leaving little for watering crops or cleaning.

Resident Balungile Nene fetches water from the stream.

“The water is dirty and full of faeces from the cattle. When it rains, our pit latrines overflow into the river and we get very sick.”



Balungile describes how her child developed scabs and sores on her skin. The Woza Moya community caregivers identified the condition as ringworm, a fungal skin disease associated with poor personal hygiene that requires frequent washing and sterilising of clothing in hot water. It is highly contagious, and in a household where wet cloths and towels are often shared, the fungus can spread if not treated with a topical anti-fungal cream and improved hygiene.

Last year, Balungile's aunt, Dombo Nene became so ill from drinking dirty water that she had to be hospitalised due to diarrhoea. Dombo has not yet recovered the weight she lost and her health remains poor.

Another resident, Celiwe Duma tells us:

"We know that we should boil the water to kill the bacteria, but if I do not have enough wood for the cooking fire and cannot wait to use the water, I will throw some bleach in the water so that I can use it quickly."

While bleach can be effective in killing germs, it destroys bacteria indiscriminately and long-term use can result in a lowered immune system, a consequence that a community vulnerable to diseases like HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis can scarcely afford.

Where women and girls are traditionally responsible for the household chores of fetching water and firewood, the illness of one member of a household has a dramatic impact on the family's wellbeing.





A young child pumps water out of the ground in the Ufafa Valley where Woza Moya runs a WASH program. This is a daily event for rural community members to get water for drinking and washing clothes.

PHOTO © Matthew Willman / Oxfam

COMMUNITY CAREGIVERS SPREAD POSITIVE LIVING

In 2012, it was estimated that 12.2% of the population, or 6.4 million people, were HIV positive. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest HIV prevalence rate across the provinces at 16.9%.⁷

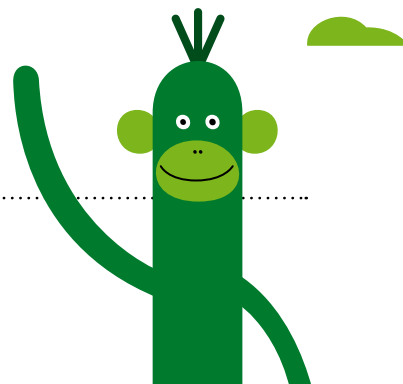
In the 15 years that Woza Moya has operated in the Ufafa Valley, it has made significant progress in encouraging people to know their status and seek treatment, slowly reducing stigma within the community. Knowing one's status however is just one small part of the battle.

Home-Based Care Manager, Jane Nxasane has been part of Woza Moya's journey from the beginning when she began as a volunteer 14 years ago. Now head of a team of 35 women who collectively deliver home-based care to over 1,000 households every month, Jane is intimately aware of the challenges facing her community. She openly shares her HIV status to encourage people to seek treatment and live a productive life.

CRAFT HELPS WOMEN TO MAINTAIN THEIR HEALTH

The nearest clinic, for people living in the Ufafa valley, is 14 kilometres away in Ixopo, where the district houses all of its government offices. But with limited regular transport into the area, patients seeking healthcare wait for taxis to take them into town and pay a fare from limited household budgets. Once there, the queues can mean a long wait to be attended.

⁷ <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/research-data/view/6871>



Woza Moya began to notice an increasing number of patients were defaulting on their treatment because getting to the clinic to collect their medication was costly. Today more than 150 people can collect their antiretrovirals directly from Woza Moya and community craft projects that employ close to a dozen women have ensured the most vulnerable are able to earn an income.

The sock monkey project, for example, produces unique handcrafted creations that are sold to visitors and, more recently, exported overseas. Each product is the culmination of sewing, knitting and embroidery by the women crafters. As a result, the sock monkeys have become a powerful symbol of positive livelihoods by providing a much needed income stream to the women who make them.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

For good health and treatment adherence, nutritious food and clean water are also needed. Without adequate clean water many gains can be lost.

Jane says:

"I sometimes feel like we take one step forward, and two steps back."

Woza Moya has been working with the community to know how to purify water and improve their personal hygiene through good handwashing. Woza Moya is seeing a decrease in the number of people with water-borne diseases. Staff show people how to build tippy taps and how to use the power of the sun to destroy bacteria.

The simple idea of solar water disinfection (SODIS), which is advocated by the World Health Organisation, is that clear PET bottles are laid horizontally in the sun to attract UV rays capable of destroying 98% of bacteria after just a few hours of sunshine.

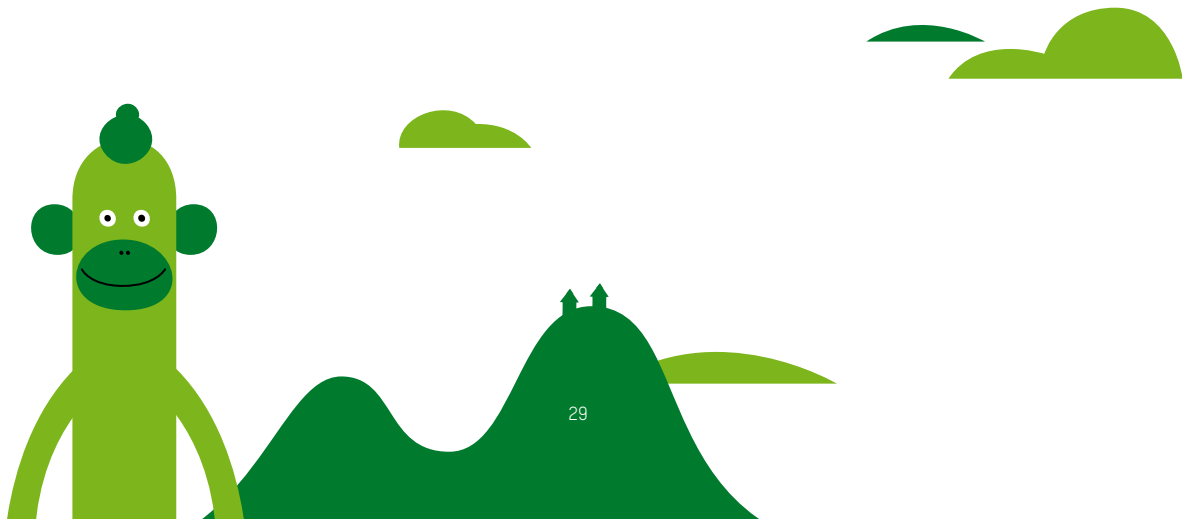
As knowledge about HIV and AIDS has grown, so too has understanding that improved nutrition to build the body's immune system is vital to staying healthy. Jane explains:

"The pills are not enough. We must also eat well."

In a community where households have limited water for basic needs, there is little extra to grow crops. Health is closely linked to the availability of water and food. Medications taken on empty stomachs make it harder for the dedicated caregivers working for a healthy community.

Says Jane:

"Sometimes we feel like we are doing this alone. I just wish the government could go faster and help us build this community together."



The background is a vibrant green landscape with rolling hills. There are several stylized trees with dark green foliage and purple trunks. The sky is a lighter shade of green and contains three white, semi-circular clouds. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

STORIES OF AACES PARTNERS:

ONE VOICE SOUTH AFRICA

During apartheid young people in South Africa brought about change by taking to the streets to protest against the enforced use of English and Afrikaans as the main languages of instruction at schools. They were met with brutal force, but their sacrifices brought about change.

Twenty years on, their bravery has become one of the cornerstones of South Africa's new democracy that grants every child the right to an education in their mother tongue and the right to a safe and supportive upbringing.

Inspired by their courage, OneVoice South Africa (OVSA) continues to recognise the pivotal role that young people play in shaping the country's future. South Africa's population in mid-2014 was 54 million, with a significant 30% of the population aged younger than 15 years.⁸

But while hard fought political freedoms have sought to uphold the rights of the child, continuing social inequality has left many young people to navigate the harsh realities of growing up in difficult circumstances, often on their own. Many young South Africans continue to be raised by extended families and relatives while parents seek work in urban centres.

These children are often left to their own devices to determine their values, figure out puberty and contemplate their futures. To empower young people to make more informed decisions about responsible living and support them in becoming more productive citizens, OVSA partners with 22 schools across four districts of KwaZulu-Natal (eThekweni, Umgungundlovu, iLembe and Umkhanyakude districts) to deliver these skills.

⁸ <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022014.pdf>

Targeting high school learners and young adults, vital life skills are passed on through a series of in-depth workshops that address critical health and lifestyle themes. Workshops cover topics such as HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, water, sanitation and hygiene, gender as well as human rights.

With the rate of unemployment for youth aged between 18 and 35 years at 42.1%⁹, OVSA also offers training on enterprise development that helps young people identify their strengths and weaknesses, stimulate an entrepreneurial mind-set at a young age and map a career plan.

What makes OVSA's approach unique is the active engagement and involvement of young people in the learning process. Driven by a team of young facilitators who encourage peer to peer learning, OVSA's team (many of whom grew up in the areas in which they work), can easily identify with and relate to the issues young people are grappling with. The workshops not only provide young learners with a safe platform to make their voices heard, but also engage them in positive debate that encourages them to formulate solutions while reflecting on their place in the world.

⁹ www.sassa.gov.za/index.php/knowledge-centre/statistical-reports?start=30

KWAMGAGA HIGH SCHOOL GROWS HOPE IN UMLAZI

Food gardens at schools are living classrooms that can be used to pass on skills and knowledge to live sustainably from one generation to the next, plant in harmony with the seasons, rebuild the soil and may even inspire learners to consider a career in agriculture that will contribute to a food secure nation.

Education is not the only task that teachers in South Africa must tackle every day. With many households accessing social grants, the level of poverty translates to a collective social burden that often calls for teachers to act as caregivers and social workers.

In 2000, when a child fainted from hunger, Maidu Cele, a teacher at KwaMgaga High School for 30 years, reached out.

“At first I just brought sandwiches from home, but as we became aware of more and more children who were going hungry, I could not manage alone.”

Maidu challenged the other teachers to do the same and in no time almost all 40 teachers were packing an extra lunch to support at least 70 identified vulnerable children.

But it wasn't long before this act of kindness proved inadequate in the school, which is situated in the sprawling township of Umlazi and has 1,300 learners.

A longstanding partnership with OVSA, a youth-based organisation that delivers life skills and human rights-based training to learners provided the ideal solution.



OVSA Facilitator, Delisile Mdabe explains:

“KwaMgaga should qualify for support from the Department of Education’s School Nutrition Scheme, but as it has been incorrectly categorised, the most sustainable path was to support the school in growing its own food and supplying their soup kitchen.”

OVSA brought in permaculture experts Siyavuna to provide practical training and knowledge on organic farming techniques that complement the school curriculum. Since 2010, Siyavuna Development Centre has empowered 600 rural farmers to grow organic produce across the region and support them in bringing their produce to market under the collective brand ‘Kumnandi’, and upholding the principle of fair trade.

Back at KwaMgaga, lessons began in July 2014, when an excited cohort of learners and teachers came together under the tutorage of Siyavuna’s Philani Ndwandwe. Class representatives from Grades 10 and 11, operators of the feeding scheme and teachers responsible for agriculture and life skills, learned how to transform their theoretical knowledge into practice. Philani explains:

“Organic farming is like imitating how nature operates in the wild.”

Philani describes the need to develop a planting schedule that followed the seasons and avoid pesticides through companion planting, and how to establish a compost heap from organic waste.

OVSA also sought to include the community in the training. Says Marlijn van Berne, OVSA’s Managing Director:

“We identified a very successful farmer who lives close to the school and has been using vacant land on the school grounds to grow his crops. He offered to become a permanent mentor to the children and staff and thus support them on their efforts.”

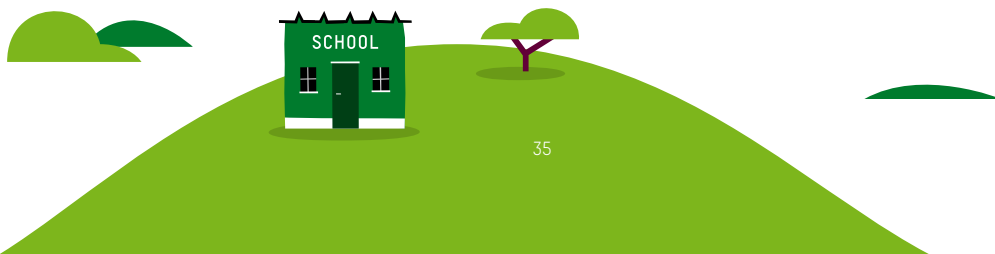
The importance of access to adequate nutrition has been well established in ensuring that learners are able to concentrate throughout the day. The Department of Basic Education recognised this link nearly 20 years ago, and since 1996, its school nutrition program has subsidised thousands of the poorest schools to receive food parcels to provide for a daily feeding scheme. These are typically categorised as No-Fee schools, falling into Quintile 1 or 2, where the socio-economic conditions of the surrounding area reflect the highest levels of unemployment and poverty and usually translate into vulnerable communities. But no such subsidies exist for Quintile 3 and 4 schools, where schools typically occur in wealthier areas and parents are able to pay fees.

So what happens when the government gets this classification wrong?

This is what happened at KwaMgaga High School. Listed by the Department of Education as a Quintile 3 school, KwaMgaga is not eligible to receive any support from the nutrition scheme, despite a real need.

Six months on, the school's senior agricultural teacher Kenneth Kambule is proud to report that the school has regularly harvested spinach, beetroot, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and carrots that help provide a healthy balanced meal for vulnerable learners every day.

While the garden continues to grow with donations of seedlings and new ground is being ploughed to expand their yield, the learners are the real inspiration. Even though their school is in need of repairs and expansion to ease the overcrowded classrooms that sometimes have to hold up to 60 learners, the neat and tidy grounds show a sense of pride and responsibility that proves the OVSA-school partnership is succeeding.



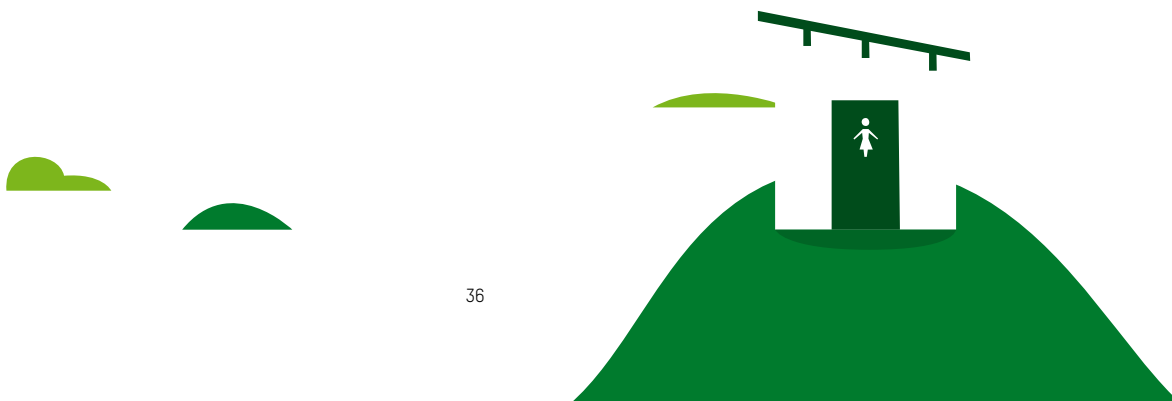
BRINGING DIGNITY TO THE GIRLS OF NDWEDWE

Menstruation can be confusing, just like other changes that come about with puberty. Girls should also not miss or drop out of school because of a lack of sanitation facilities to accommodate them, particularly during their menstrual cycle.

Absenteeism, driven by a lack of adequate sanitation at schools that should offer a sense of privacy and dignity, is not the only obstacle holding girls back. In vulnerable communities, sanitary towels are often unaffordable, compromising health and hygiene for many young girls.

OVSA, as an organisation that facilitates life skills training for young people across 22 schools in KwaZulu-Natal, is no stranger to this problem. At Isifisoethu High School in Ndwedwe, a remote village situated deep in the hills above Stanger, learners are struggling to complete their education in an area lacking much needed infrastructure.

More than an hour north-west of Durban, an increasing trend of eroded fields blanket the hillside where felled plantations are no longer replanted. The forestry companies have pulled out and taken jobs with them. The nearest shop is more than an hour's walk from the school and with little disposable income, it is only the essentials that are traded. At more than three times the price of a loaf of bread, sanitary towels are a luxury.



In a dilapidated classroom, a hot corrugated iron roof sags over a rough plastered room with empty window frames. A group of adolescent girls aged between 14 and 16 have gathered to share their stories on what it's like to grow up in Ndwedwe. Each proudly holds a bag that contains a supply of washable cotton sanitary pads and an information leaflet. The Dignity Dream packs have opened up a dialogue on menstruation management, a conversation that is not often discussed at home. One girl explains bravely:

"We don't talk about such things with our parents. In our culture, when a girl has her period, she is looked upon with suspicion for maybe having given up her virginity and being unclean."

The intervention is the result of the candid exchange that happens when OVSA's facilitators build a relationship of trust with learners and discover the challenges they may be facing. Topics such as personal hygiene and reproductive health are part of OVSA's Life Skills Project, and workshops delivered over a series of weeks by OVSA program officers focus on participatory engagement. But in rural communities such as Ndwedwe, the visible absence of adequate water and sanitation adds further challenges around hygiene practices for the community.

With the help of Oxfam Australia in Southern Africa, a WASH program aimed at supporting rural communities to improve WASH has enabled OVSA to install a reticulated hand wash basin in both of the sanitation blocks. The number of toilets, however, is inadequate with just 10 toilets serving nearly 420 learners. Water-borne sanitation is extremely rare in rural areas where pit latrines remain common place. In this isolated region, the toilet doors and locks have long since been stripped by vandals and girls have no privacy. One girl says:

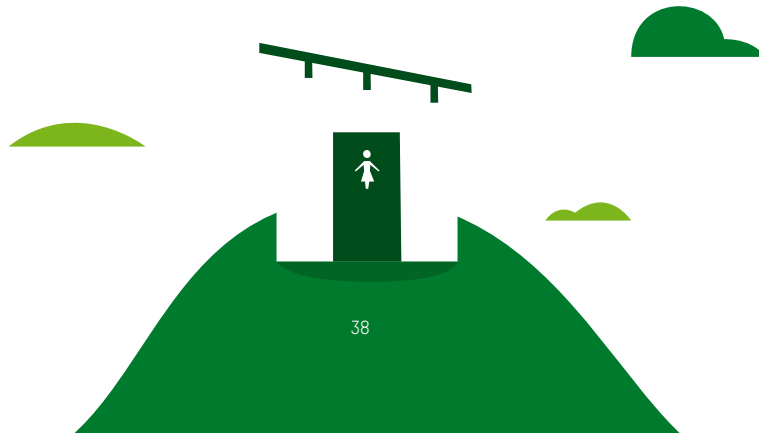


“I don’t like coming to school during my period because anyone can walk in on me.”

In the school yard, there is just one tap that trickles out water and must provide for all the drinking needs of the children during break time.

The level of despondency amongst the staff is palpable. With two battered water tanks lying in the yard, unable to be connected to the gutters, no rain water can be harvested and no funds are available for the repairs. The school at times feels forgotten by its municipality and struggles to get together a small stipend to purchase soap for handwashing.

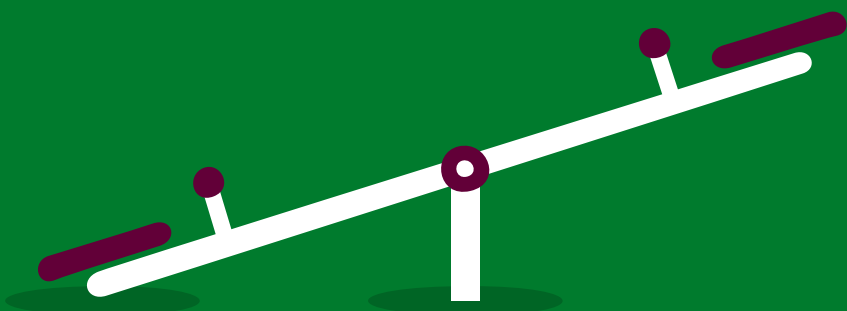
A quick survey amongst the girls reveals that just one in five has a tap or water point near their home. Most will spend up to an hour fetching water from a neighbouring water point to complete their daily chores. But all agree that the option of something reusable and washable is infinitely better than nothing at all. The small drawstring bags containing the washable sanitary pads make them feel acknowledged; that someone knows what they are going through and cares.



A stylized landscape illustration. The background is a gradient of green. In the foreground, there are rolling hills in shades of green. Several trees with dark green foliage and brown trunks are scattered across the hills. In the sky, there are three white, rounded cloud shapes. On the right side, there is a white structure resembling a goalpost or a stand with two vertical poles and a horizontal bar at the top.

STORIES OF AACES PARTNERS:

SAVE THE CHILDREN



For more than 50 years, Save the Children (SC) has had a presence in KwaZulu-Natal working to protect the rights of children, advocating for their right to social development and a safe environment. In a country where children are often the most vulnerable to poverty, disease and social inequality, SC has supported their educational, health and nutritional needs and helped provide a solid foundation in life.

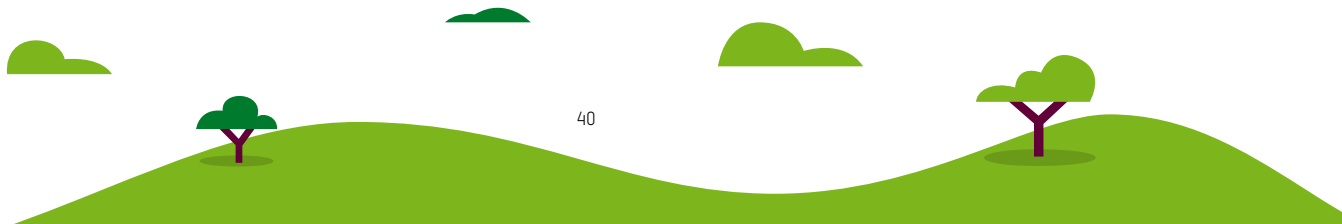
South Africa remains an unequal society where the disparity between rich and poor means large numbers of children are vulnerable to poverty, the effects of HIV and poor access to services for households.

The government has sought to provide a safety net by providing child support grants. However, at about R300 a month, the grant may cover some of the costs of food, education and child care.

THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS

It is widely accepted that the first 1,000 days of a child's life shapes their potential in later years to function healthily – emotionally, socially and academically. This is complemented by the pre-foundation learning phase, called ECD, which, along with the first 1,000 days, is being given global recognition as potentially being an equalising factor that could contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty.

But in South Africa where only a third of children currently access formal ECD, it has largely become the domain of non-profit organisations, like SC and community initiatives, to fill the void and ensure that all young children have access to a safe and stimulating environment to learn and grow.



The welfare of South African children from birth to four years of age forms part of the Department of Social Development's (DoSD) portfolio. While all childcare centres are required to register with the state, the government's capacity remains constrained, making it difficult to provide the necessary training and mentorship needed to support practitioners, and undertake the regular monitoring role to ensure that facilities meet their stringent standards.

While childcare centres do their best to comply, one of the greatest burdens facing the owners of these centres is that of financial sustainability. In vulnerable communities where childcare fees may be beyond the reach of many parents and guardians, caregivers face the uncomfortable challenge of having to ask for money that simply isn't there. When the alternative means a child being left at home unattended, owners of childcare centres often feel a moral obligation to accept children into their centres with no or limited payment.

It is possible for childcare centres to obtain a subsidy from the state, but not before meeting an onerous accreditation process that often requires owners to upgrade their facilities and employ additional staff at their own cost. However, this registration does not automatically qualify them for financial support.

Special needs education has its own challenges with no additional government subsidies to support children with learning difficulties, despite a high prevalence in the area of conditions like foetal alcohol syndrome, which may affect one in 15 children. Similarly, no government subsidies exist for teachers wanting to expand their skills to cater for special needs.

Together with the community of Wentworth and the eThekweni Municipality, SC has been instrumental in bringing together local stakeholders to find workable solutions for these problems and ensure that childcare centres get the support they need.

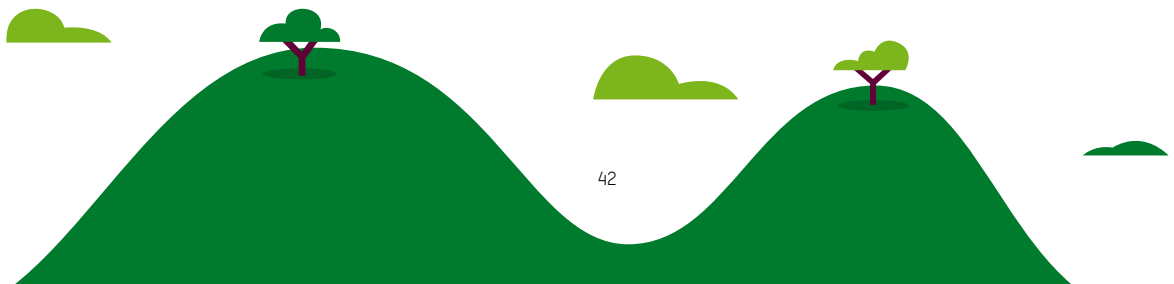
THE WENTWORTH ECD FORUM

Just south of Durban, a unique network has brought over 50 childcare practitioners together to learn and share. Their ongoing commitment to meeting the learning requirements and safety standards for ECD has culminated in a forum that is now being adopted as a national role model.

In the troubled community of Wentworth, a group of dedicated childcare givers and child centre owners have met every month for the past five years to exchange ideas on how to improve their ECD facilities and skills. These extraordinary women are part of the Wentworth ECD Forum (WECDF) that was started in 2009 out of concern for the lack of regulatory oversight in the childcare sector. Since then, the forum has grown into an effective self-regulating body that is successfully closing the gap between policy and practice, and holding stakeholders accountable.

Wentworth has a population of about 27,000 and seems an unlikely epicentre for social change. Designated as a 'coloured' township under the 1950 Group Areas Act, Wentworth continues to grapple with the spatial politics and socio-economic inequalities left behind by apartheid. Unemployment, gangsterism, teenage pregnancy and violent crime are amongst the issues confronting the community.

But despite the community battling poverty and complex social issues, there are many loyal residents who refuse to succumb to the apathy and sentiment that Wentworth has been forgotten. Gail Richards, who has lived in the community for 47 years and has been a major catalyst in bringing together stakeholders working in the ECD sector, explains:



“We wanted to create a holistic, child-centred vision for childcare in Wentworth. This meant abandoning blame and bringing people from all spheres of civil society, the private sector and government together to help us craft positive solutions.”

Gail explains the benefits of service providers coming together as a group:

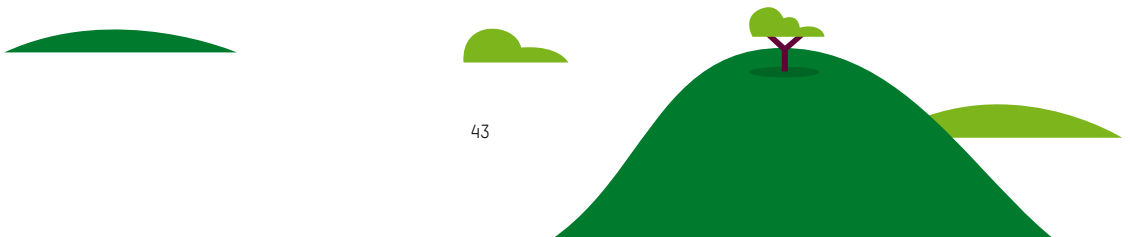
“We’ve created a knowledge hub where all issues related to children’s health, learning and welfare can be channelled.”

While a mentor has been recruited to offer expert knowledge and guidance, the learning is also delivered through the sharing of collective experience that values the contribution of each individual member.

Doreen Hamiel is a veteran principal with more than 40 years of experience in ECD and remedial teaching. She has been passing on her knowledge to her peers ever since. Doreen explains:

“We have become a sounding board for each other because this is a space where we feel safe and understood.”

What is remarkable about the WECDF is not just how its voluntary membership grew from four to over 50 people in only a few months, but how commitment and participation has been sustained for more than five years. How did a people-centred approach that prioritises relationships over processes transform a system? Mapping some of these hallmarks of success may help guide other communities that identify with Wentworth’s story to replicate its model.



MENTORING TOWARDS COMPLIANCE

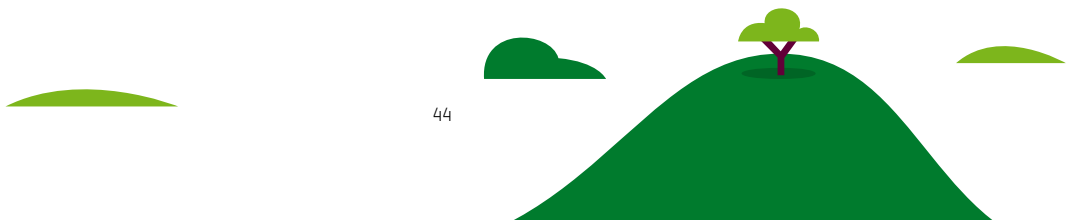
When the forum began in 2009, SC identified 24 ECD services in the area, none of which were registered with DoSD. Two thirds of these were home-based, operating out of enclosed backyards or modified garages. None of these facilities had been visited by a social worker. When SC brought to the attention of the operators of these services the norms and standards that needed to be met in order to meet compliance, their desire to improve and learn proved overwhelming, and the forum quickly organised itself into a centre of learning.

Eurakha Singh from the eThekweni Municipality talks about the first meeting of the centres:

“One of the most profound outcomes from the first dialogue that alerted to us how beneficial a capacity building platform for ECD practitioners could be, was realising how child centre owners felt afraid of being exposed for not being registered with the authorities and had isolated themselves as a result, rather than seeking support.”

From the outset, the priorities of the forum were to systematically support every ECD service to meet the norms and standards set by DoSD and steer them towards becoming registered as fully compliant facilities.

To guide the practitioners towards best practice, SC served as an anchor for the team and chief mentor. The Director of SC, Mari van der Merwe, who has a history of long involvement in the area and leadership of community programs brought decades of social work experience that actually began in Wentworth. Within SC is the knowledge of an organisation that has set the benchmark on ethical interaction and protection of children’s rights around the world.



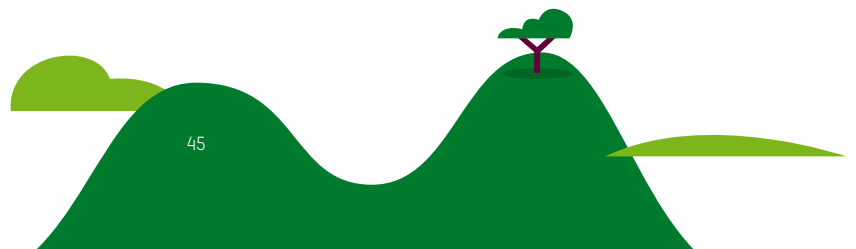
Already six ECD centres have achieved accreditation with eThekweni Municipality's Environmental Health Services with several more nearing completion. Roselind Rose, who has lived in Wentworth for 25 years, mentors the ECD services towards compliance as a partial care centre as well as to meet the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS). Her introduction to ECD began when she was an anxious mother, like so many others. Not being comfortable with entrusting her child to a stranger, she opened her own home-based crèche. When more children joined, Roselind looked to Swinton College to acquire the necessary training and skills. Fifteen years on, Roselind has taught across the age spectrum and in numerous communities across KwaZulu-Natal.

Rose's eye for detail has made her an expert on managing the processes required to meet the rules and regulations, and she quickly recites a checklist of registers that cover attendance, compliance, nutrition, health, cleaning and safety. The structural hurdles remain the toughest to overcome as no financial subsidies are available for requirements like one child-sized toilet for every 20 learners, or additional staff for every five children taken into care. Budgets earned through childcare fees barely cover the cost of the two required daily meals and basic salaries, let alone pay to build, renovate, expand old garages into functional healthy classrooms and provide safe and stimulating recreational spaces.

Gail raises another challenge:

"We have also recognised that many owners lack administrative and business skills to manage their finances and reporting."

This is now being addressed through group training that would never have been viable without the collective influence of the forum.





A child accesses water from a storage tank at Bhekithemba Creche, which is part of the SC WASH program.
PHOTO © Matthew Willman / Oxfam

PARTNERING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

In today's critical climate where government is frequently the target, little credit is given to the civil servants who pursue their work with passion. Without Eurakha Singh, the high-level coordination needed across multiple government departments to provide a holistic response for children's needs, would have remained bogged down in faceless bureaucracy.

Bright and bold, and entirely dedicated to her role at eThekweni Municipality, Eurakha brings a human face to government engagement. As one of the founding partners of the WECDf, Eureka's background in social work has given her a unique insight into the interconnectedness between ECD and service delivery. Acting as a bridge between local government and the Wentworth community, Eureka's 10 years of organisational memory provides a rare continuity that allows an honest reflection of past successes and failures and a living record of lessons learned.

Without Eureka's empathic leadership, eThekweni Municipality may not have hosted the first ECD Indaba that brought 400 stakeholders together in 2009. Eurakha says she was really concerned by the six pages of issues that were produced as an outcome at the Indaba. However, they set the wheels in motion for a multi-disciplinary approach to the sector that is working to meet the needs of the whole child.

In the private sector, local corporations like South African Petroleum Refineries (SAPREF) are showing greater social responsibility and responding to the ECD sector's needs. Last year, the oil refinery sponsored 28 practitioners to earn their first aid qualification, which is a critical requirement for safety within the childcare centres.

One aspect of the system that worries Rose is the welfare of children who fall through the cracks because of their age. DoSD is only mandated to deal with children up to the age of four years old, but some five-year-old children are still too young to enter primary school. As a result of the WECDf engagements, the issue was raised to the level of DoSD and is now under discussion.

BRINGING HEALTH TO THE COMMUNITY

Sister Renette Roskruge is an expert in navigating the public healthcare system. She has spent the last 10 years practicing as a clinical nurse across the South Durban Basin. As a recent partner of the WECDF, Renette has made massive strides in streamlining the healthcare needs of Wentworth's ECD services in just two years.

Under the new integrated provincial strategy Operation Sukuma Sakhe, which calls on communities to join forces with government to 'stand up and build', the vision is that healthcare will reach the community at household level. Specially trained community caregivers, acting as the on the ground contact for the program are required to visit three households a day, but a shortage of staff means this target is seldom met.

Through the WECDF, Renette has discovered that providing health screening directly at ECD centre level is proving very effective. On a single day, through a singular visit, up to 50 children can be immunised, given dental and eyesight screening and weighed to monitor their growth development.

The relationship between hygiene and health has been increasingly emphasised since Oxfam Australia reached out to the WECDF to provide WASH training.

As each of the ECD centres strive to meet the compliance standards set by government, Sister Renette and Sister Doreen Louis, who is also a qualified nurse and, like Sister Renette, a resident from the community, provide mentorship and training to the ECD centres on effective handwashing and hygiene protocols.



Bronwyn Fisher has become one of the project champions for reinforcing handwashing training across the ECD centres. Supported by a host of educational posters and toolkits supported by Oxfam, Bronwyn has developed handwashing songs for the children to help reinforce the behaviour. Already the snowball effect is visible as the message travels home from school.

“I’ve seen how the child can become the parent when our learners correct their parents.”

A true social entrepreneur, Bronwyn began her centre in an outbuilding in 2008 and can now accept up to 55 children at her new home where she employs three people.

Desiree Ratter is also celebrated among the forum for achieving compliance on sanitation. She has operated Friends Creche in Wentworth for nearly three years and is now licenced to care for up to 50 children. Without any outside support, she has self-funded improvements at her property by installing additional child-sized toilets and boasts impeccable hygiene. This has come at a price, which meant Desiree sacrificing her own salary for a few months to complete the improvements.

Every year on October 15, the world celebrates Global Handwashing Day to raise awareness about the link in uplifting health and reducing the spread of diseases. In 2014, the WASH Programme and Handwashing initiative of the WECDF earned the recognition of both the National Department of Health and UNICEF.

The partnership with Oxfam and the WECDF Forum on the WASH program has really empowered the ECD centres to become more knowledgeable and confident about managing health standards and subsequent inspections. Renette explains that the centres no longer wait for government officials to pay them a visit, but instead – as occurred in October 2014 – they extend an invitation to the Department of Environmental Health to conduct inspections.

RECOGNISING THE VALUABLE ROLE OF CAREGIVERS

Behind every individual forum member, is a compelling and deliberate journey that has brought them into the sector. Nishell Pieters of Wonderland Crèche describes it:

“Taking care of children is not just a job for me; it’s a calling.”

The valuable service being offered by committed caregivers and childcare centre owners to the broader community is often minimised or entirely overlooked. Wonderland was created to ensure the safety of children in a dangerous hotspot where alcohol abuse had led to the sexual abuse of a toddler.

Gender stereotyping by a largely patriarchal society has resulted in the role of caregivers being taken for granted, rather than seen as a valuable social service. Not only does childcare ensure young children – who might otherwise be neglected during the day – are taken care of and developed, but it also affords mothers and guardians the space to access work opportunities with peace of mind.

Despite DoSD insisting that childcare centres must be operated by accredited ECD professionals, there is limited assistance offered in helping to subsidise the costs of such vocational training.

Across the network of extraordinary women, the dedication to their work is absolute. Gail finds their sacrifice of personal time humbling, as members only agree to meeting on a Saturday when it will not interrupt their childcare regiment.



Tessa Beaumont is a professional nurse who heads up a local branch of the international charity, Keep a Child Alive, from the Blue Roof Wellness Centre. She recognised the level of commitment given by the caregivers would not be sustained unless the members remained mindful of their own healthcare needs.

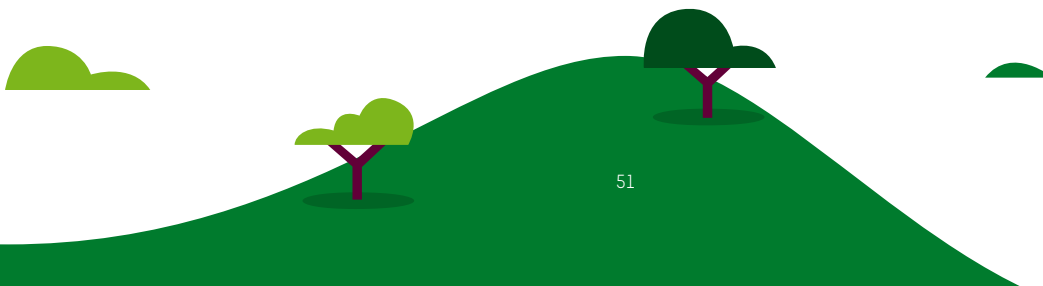
“You cannot give back to your community if your batteries are flat.”

So as part of her community health outreach that provides HIV testing, counselling and treatment to youth at the local community health centre, Tessa also devised an occupational wellness program.

“We needed a new source of income to support our charitable work, so we took our health service to companies interested in supporting the wellbeing of their employees.”

As a result of the efforts of Tessa, together with her colleague Doreen Louis, also a professional nurse, all members of the ECD forum now receive free regular medical check-ups that include blood pressure checks, diabetes assessments, HIV testing and counselling, tuberculosis testing and counselling, and breast examinations, as well as information about menopause and personal stress management.

A celebration of Women’s Day has also become a regular event on the WECDF’s calendar. Organised by Bronwyn and the committee, a day of fashion, beauty and nutritional tips allow local businesses and ordinary residents to show their appreciation for the important role these women play in their community.



A SAFETY NET FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

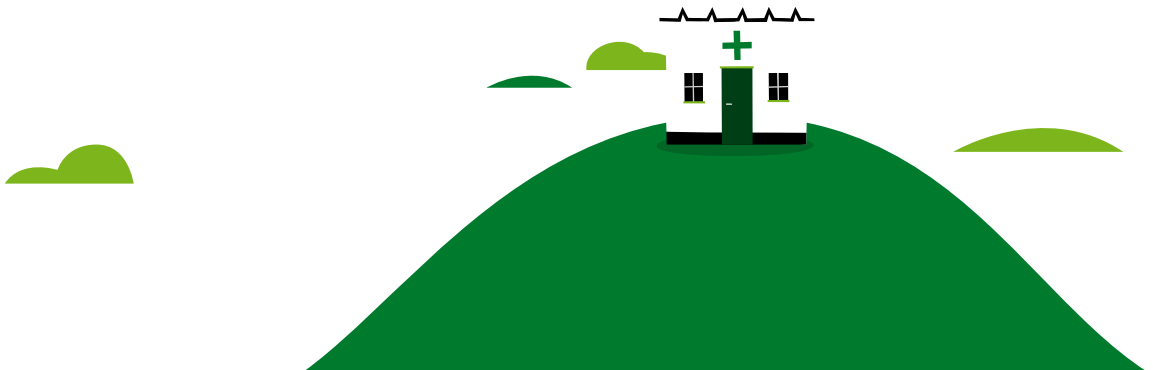
It is vulnerable children who have benefitted the most from this collective network. Renette has negotiated express access for ECD centre owners to manage minor ailments or injuries at the Gateway Clinic with efficient and prompt service for the children.

When Nishell Pieters of Wonderland Crèche noticed some stubborn sores on a child's scalp, she took the child to the smaller Wentworth Hospital. Despite being sent home with a treatment plan, the child's sores persisted.

"I realised that something might not be right at home."

An intervention by welfare services revealed that the family could not afford to pay their utilities and since their water had been cut off, the child's hygiene had deteriorated and the child was not being given medication regularly. Nishell then took the child directly to Gateway Clinic, a larger more comprehensive facility where the nurse, social worker and parent were brought together to give Nishell permission to administer the medication.

This case provided a startling realisation that despite the presence of reticulated water in the area, access to services cannot be assumed when poverty is so pervasive. It also showed the power of the forum working to engage multiple actors from different sectors to resolve a single issue in the interests of the young child.





An outdoor toilet next to a community hall in an area served by SC KwaZulu-Natal's WASH program.
PHOTO © Matthew Willman / Oxfam

LITTLE DAVID STRIVES FOR EXCELLENCE

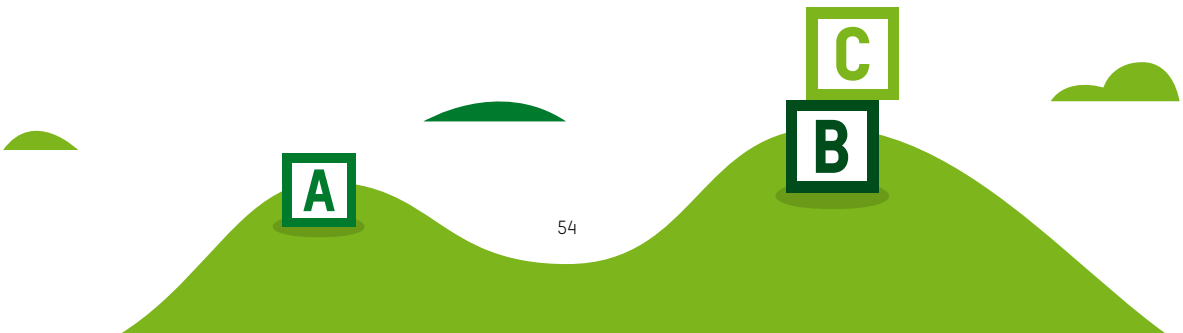
Situated on the main thoroughfare through town, Little David is a landmark in Wentworth, known to all its residents. As one of the earliest ECD services started in 1992, it has raised thousands of children and supported more vulnerable cases than any other centre in the community. This important role led to Little David being prioritised by the WECDf for registration with the DoSD. But apart from the very real need to help this centre secure some financial relief by way of a government subsidy, the forum also looked up to Little David as a role model and it soon became the benchmark against which all other centres were measured.

Principal of Little David, Pearl Windhogel, is largely responsible for how this facility came to be a centre of excellence. During her 20 years at Little David, Pearl has struggled to engage the government to address their needs.

“The government staff change constantly and although we are required to fill out all sorts of reports that take up so much time, we never receive feedback.”

As a registered NPO, Little David can now undertake its own fundraising, but little spare time remains to pursue this.

Limited income is received from DoSD. The stipend is just R15 per child per day, which is only for children who qualify on a means test. Never the less, Little David’s facilities are immaculate.



A shortage of space means that several age groups are being taught in different corners of a freshly painted classroom that must be transformed throughout the day for mealtime and naptime. Until then, two educators posted on opposite sides of the room try to make themselves heard over a competing chorus of little voices.

Pearl proudly shows off the educational toys they received as part of their partnership with the Unlimited Child, an organisation that addresses the quality of ECD program that are being provided at ECD centres. The toys are neatly packed amongst the puppets and paints that all converge to create a place of delight and stimulation for Wentworth's future generation. Outside in the neatly tended garden, tiny seedlings have been laid out by the children who are learning to care for things under the supervision of Wentworth's biggest pride.

In 2013, ECD Practitioner at Little David, Noblelen Boyles, was named the Best ECD Practitioner in South Africa at the prestigious SA ABSA ECD Awards. But this accomplishment cannot be properly appreciated without the context of Noblelen's determination to defy her background. She proudly completed her Matric certificate at the age of 50 and went on to qualify as an ECD practitioner¹⁰; despite her new accolades that may have opened up many new job opportunities to her she has no intention of moving away from Wentworth and is now studying through UNISA to complete a Bachelor of Education foundation phase qualification.



¹⁰ She completed a level four qualification accredited with the National Qualifications Framework's Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority.

SOCIAL CAPITAL TURNS WECDF INTO A NATIONAL ROLE MODEL

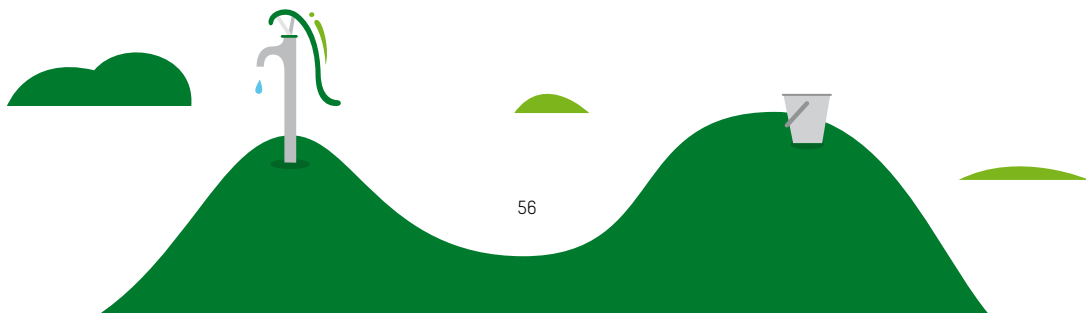
In 2015, SC was also invited to submit a case study of WECDF for possible inclusion in the city's Municipal Institute of Learning platform, for meeting the criteria of 'Successful, Innovative, Excellence, Impact, Sustainability & Replicability' in a project.

The eThekweni Municipality's Eurakha says:

"The Wentworth ECD Forum is one of Durban's most celebrated success stories of innovation and sustainability because the community has complete ownership. It does not mean we have solved the institutional challenges of the day, but we have empowered a community to hold government to account and gained their trust as partners."

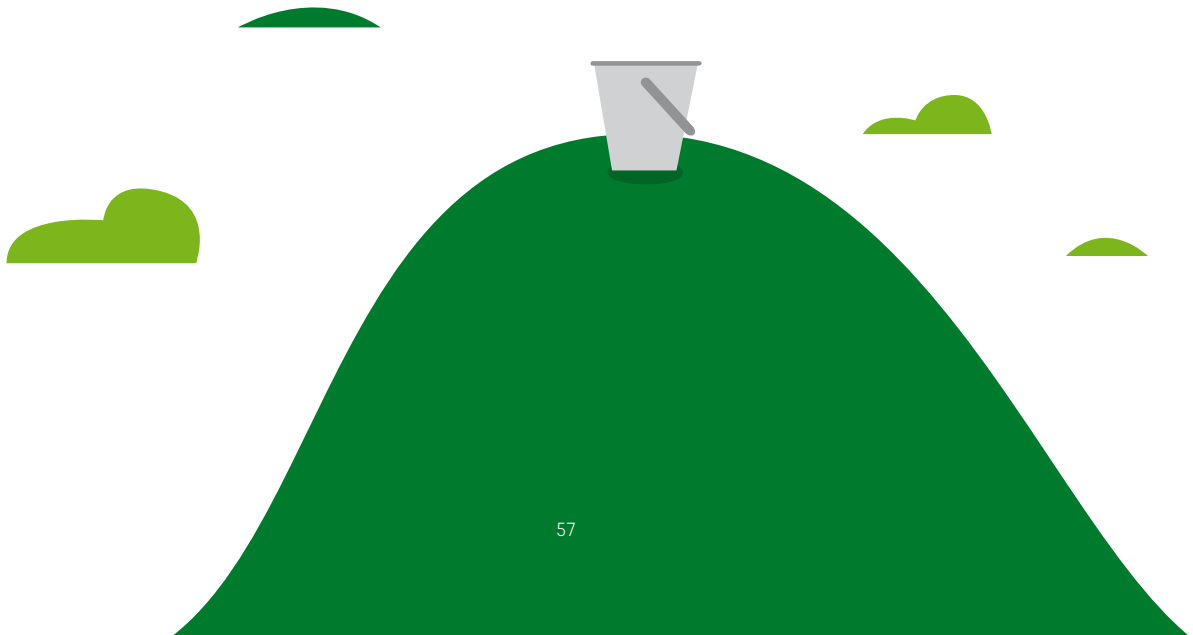
The overwhelming interest across eThekweni has led to practitioners from Tongaat, Lamontville, the Bluff, Isipingo, Merebank and Umlazi being eager to join the conversation. The DoSD has since recognised the value of the WECDF model and believes it is worth replicating around the country.

This is the irony of development. Partners often need to see some form of initiative and promise of success before joining hands, perhaps because it offers the greatest chance of sustainability.



WECDF is a simple model that relies on the power of social ties and relationships to achieve its results. 'Social capital' describes the sum of collective human bonds and relationships that bring about social cohesion to a community and reap productive results. This human-centred approach is unquestionably what has empowered Wentworth to participate in its own positive transformation. Like any investment, the more skills, knowledge and innovation that are applied, the more likely you are to achieve growth.

This is how a tiny pebble like Wentworth could create ripples big enough to catch the attention of national government and shine a light on the very real issues faced by the ECD sector every day.



The background features a stylized landscape with rolling hills in shades of green. There are several white, semi-circular clouds scattered across the sky. Two small trees with green foliage and purple trunks are positioned on the hills. A thick, light blue line runs horizontally across the middle of the image, with several curved, pipe-like extensions that meander across the lower half of the frame. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

STORIES OF AACES PARTNERS:

THOLULWAZI UZIVIKELE

In 2002 a group of medical volunteers working at the local hospital in Manguzi turned their frustration into action. They realised that the patients reaching the hospital for HIV testing and treatment represented the tip of the iceberg and that a different way was needed to reach the greater community at risk and bring the pandemic under control.

As a result, Tholulwazi Uzivikele (TU) was formed in an area of about 5,000 square kilometres that contained just one tarred road. The first outreach project provided home-based care attempting to reach people living in nearly 50 widely dispersed communities operating under local chieftains.

The grassroots approach relied on community volunteers to make door-to-door house calls to access the sick or vulnerable, addressing some of the greatest barriers the healthcare system faced at the time: access and social stigma.

With a predominantly rural population that is still desperately under-serviced by life-giving infrastructure such as water and electricity, TU's mandate has expanded to more sustainably address the socio-economic challenges.

TU believes that empowering people with knowledge is key. By working together to support traditional communities of Manguzi, TU aims to meet the needs of the most vulnerable segments of society and strengthen their resilience against poverty and disease.

The organisation provides life skills and leadership training to youth, business training to budding entrepreneurs, support to community-based crèches, support to schools, and reaches thousands of vulnerable people in remote communities through its ongoing home-based care initiative.

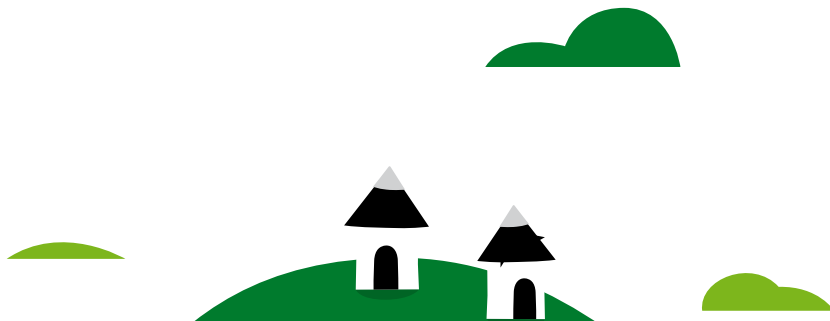
Social justice has increasingly become an important part of their work as they support vulnerable people to manage the administrative burden of accessing social grants.

Unable to address the mammoth backlog of infrastructure in the area, TU has increasingly focused on how to keep the community healthy through WASH programs, which find innovative ways to live under difficult conditions of water shortages and the absence of adequate sanitation.

Director of the organisation, Kobus Meyer explains:

“We believe we are filling a gap in supporting informal community initiatives to become fully fledged.”

Still located just a few hundred metres from Manguzi Hospital Gate, TU remains connected to its roots and determined to transform the lives of its residents.



SOCIAL BAROMETER OF UMHLABUYALINGANA

In the far north-eastern corner of South Africa, not far from the Mozambique border, lays the vibrant town of Manguzi. Named for its multitude of mango trees, it is a warm tropical place with pristine wilderness on one side, and fresh water estuaries joining the ocean on the other.

But apart from the seasonal holiday-makers, who come for fishing and camping, little else drives the economy and subsistence agriculture still dominates the region.

The deeply rural area of uMhlabuyalingana is one of five municipalities that make up the uMkhanyakude District Municipality. The population mostly live on land belonging to the Tembe Traditional Council and represents Zulu and Thonga people in the area. The area also hosts many Portuguese-speaking people who settled in the area after seeking asylum from the civil war that raged in Mozambique from 1976 to 1992.

UNDERSTANDING THE AREA'S WATER RESOURCES

A large portion of the region is protected land that has since been incorporated into the isiMangaliso Wetland Park. The region is dominated by freshwater lakes and wetlands that support a high biodiversity. An iconic feature of the Thonga culture is the sustainable fishing traps which have been used in Kosi Bay for hundreds of years.



While its proximity to a World Heritage Site has resulted in more economic opportunities because of the growth in ecotourism, it has also adversely affected the sustainable livelihoods of people, who are no longer able to access natural resources from inside the park. Traditional weaving is one of the predominant skills in the region that supports thousands of families, but this may now also be at risk with women being restricted from harvesting raphia palm for their craft.

Surrounded by shallow sandy soils, intense crop production is not possible. As a result, households that develop small garden plots have to boost growth with compost and mulch.

The freshwater systems are extremely fragile ecosystems that have only been under formal protection for the last 20 years. Abstraction from these lakes for water provision has to be managed delicately and for now there is a moratorium on pumping from Kosi Lake and Lake Sibaya. This may explain the low rate of access to piped water. An increase is only likely when the Jozini Dam Bulk Water transfer scheme gets underway or the town is connected to Hluhluwe Dam.

The level of formal education in the area remains critically low with only 22.4% of the population having completed schooling to matric and just 4.5% achieving higher education. As a result, literacy levels are low. This results in education about health and the high prevalence of HIV in the area remaining ongoing challenges for organisations working in the area.

UMHLABUYALINGANA

POPULATION
156,736

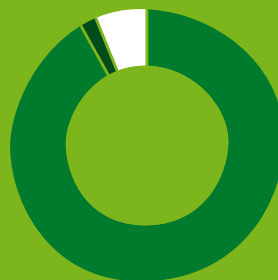
HOUSEHOLDS
33,857



UNEMPLOYMENT
47.1%



UNEMPLOYMENT (18-35YRS)
56.5%



AGRICULTURAL
6.0%
URBAN
2.0%
RURAL
92.0%



PIPED WATER
5.3%



ELECTRICITY
14.2%



FLUSH TOILETS
2.8%

WORKING WITH WASH IN SCHOOLS

Recognising that the school environment provides an opportunity for children to learn vital life skills such as hygiene and sanitation, as well as mathematics and English, TU is working with four schools in the region. The WASH ambassador program gets children, teachers, cooks and cleaning staff to work together to ensure their school environment is always clean and free from germs.

Most children do not have running water at home and parents do not necessarily understand the link between poor hygiene and the spread of preventable illness such as diarrhoea. Many of the children walk long distances along dusty roads to school. They arrive tired, hungry and dusty. Whilst the government provides school feeding, the schools themselves face similar challenges of access to water, and cooking facilities are often unhygienic, pots go unwashed and food storage facilities invite vermin and pests. Simple practices such as handwashing, keeping food off the ground, picking up litter, and growing vegetables away from rubbish dumps are unfamiliar practices for children, teachers or cooks.

In the four schools, two children per class were asked to volunteer as WASH ambassadors to help lead hygiene practices around the school. The ambassadors, together with teachers and cooking staff, mapped out the school, identifying assets and threats to hygiene. Solutions to problems were identified using forum theatre, with each school developing its own strategy for improving hygiene practices using the resources available to them. The process was owned and led by the student ambassadors.



As a result of the initiative, each school now has tippy taps outside latrines, children arrive at school early to collect any litter that was dropped the previous day and each class takes responsibility for washing their own plates after lunch, reducing the burden on the cooking staff. In some schools, gardens have been moved away from toilets or rubbish dumps, and food preparation areas have been moved where necessary.

The student ambassadors take obvious pride in their work, arriving at school in pristine uniforms with their ambassador name badges on show. They talk of being able to recycle waste, and how they have taught siblings and neighbours to wash their hands and clean up their homesteads. But perhaps the biggest change is the sense of shared responsibility and mutual trust between the teachers, children and cooks that goes beyond keeping the school premises clean and hygienic.

The school is still lacking in resources, but the program has encouraged the schools to make the most of the resources that are available. Facilitator Gidion Ntimbane states:

“If you go far from the road there is no infrastructure, both power and water are insufficient. People are crying for these things. The school ambassador program helps children to make the most of the resources they have.”





A woman collects water using a plastic drum. Small dams in water-challenged areas are used to harvest water for people to take home. Fortunately this water is clean.

PHOTO © Matthew Willman / Oxfam

MAPUTA PRIMARY SCHOOL GETS WASH WISE

The WASH program, supported by Oxfam, aims to improve access to sustainable water supplies for vulnerable communities and make more effective use of existing resources. By working with rural schools to identify their risks and opportunities, TU is helping communities to reduce their vulnerability and achieve better health.

One morning at Maputa Primary, where nearly 600 learners are buzzing across a dusty playground, a group of women stand bent over a giant cast iron pot. One of them uses a wooden spoon to scrape out the last of the stiffened white maize onto an awaiting plate. The cooking fire is down to its last eye-watering plumes of smoke, and the chores that began at dawn to stack the firewood, prepare vegetables and pap and collect over 80 litres of water for the daily feeding scheme are nearly done.

When the end of break bell sounds, TU Coordinator Sphamandla Mzobe makes his way down the long corridor of classrooms to a room where more than a dozen learners of various ages are waiting with a handful of staff and parents for a monthly workshop. The group is the WASH committee which is guided by TU to produce ideas around improving WASH at the school.

Four giant posters are set out on the floor to represent resources, risks, opportunities and proposed ideas. On the first poster, the learners draw an aerial view of their school marking out the position of taps and toilets. Over a period of months, the facilitators from TU will systematically guide the committee in identifying opportunities that the school itself can implement to improve WASH conditions.



Maputa Primary is categorised as a Quintile 1 school, meaning no school fees are payable to attend. This also means that the school has no autonomy over its operating budget to implement simple repairs and is entirely dependent on the Department of Education to release funds for any needed supplies.

This is frustrating as a few affordable adjustments could harness storage tanks to harvest rain water and augment the supply of water for the food garden and the newly planted mango trees. However, the gutters are not correctly positioned and taps at the bottom of the tanks have been removed. In the meantime, the school is connected to the main water supply, but service interruptions are frequent and the water pressure is low because of the long way the water must travel.

TU continues to help lobby government for access to basic water and sanitation as a human right, but in the meantime the project encourages the school to develop creative solutions to help protect children from the risk of disease.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

It used to be the case that when girls were menstruating many would skip school. Sanitary pads are a luxury some families cannot afford and with school toilets offering little to no privacy, and no running water for cleaning, girls would rather stay home. Says Nokwazi Mthombeni, a teacher at Maputa Primary School:

"It was just one more of those things we could do nothing about. Girls reach a certain age and they start to disappear a couple of days every month."

But something changed at Maputo Primary School after TU helped to train WASH ambassadors at the school. The child ambassadors have talked to the teachers about the problems facing girls

at the school and explained that some of the girls are living with their grandmothers, who have limited understanding of the benefits of sanitary pads, while others came from families that simply cannot afford pads because they have too many mouths to feed.

A shared sense of responsibility has developed at the school since the TU training. As a result, when the teachers heard about the challenges the girls faced they pooled some money and now provide sanitary towels to girls who don't have them.

The shared responsibility is reflected in the litter free playground, scrubbed toilets and clean cooking areas, as well as in children taking outgrown uniform items to the school to share with children who don't have enough.

Twelve-year-old S'notho became a WASH ambassador two years ago. With her interest in hygiene she has decided she wants to be a dentist when she grows up. S'notho talks about the difference the WASH intervention has made:

"Today the toilets are always clean, but they used to be really dirty all the time. Now the vendors come and sweep the area after they have finished selling, and they pick up any litter around them."

S'notho says the learnings have also spread further than the school yard:

"At home I tell the neighbour's kids to pick up the litter in their yard, and they do listen because they see how nice our yard looks."

S'notho and her friends are looking into recycling. They are being guided by their teacher to learn about recycling facilities at the landfill site and have written to the municipality to ask for separate rubbish bins to be able to provide recycling facilities at the school.

WASH AT THANDIZWE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Fourteen-year-old Sabelo proudly straightens his uniform as he explains what being a WASH ambassador means to him:

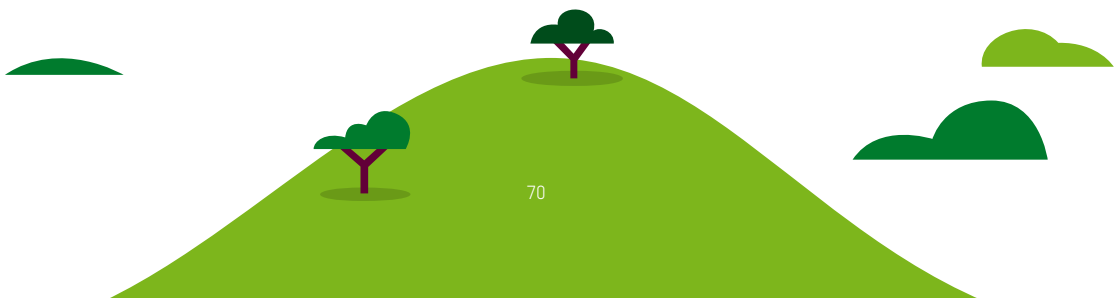
“I know this cleanliness is important because it keeps us far away from the diseases that get into children through dirtiness.”

Since the ambassador program started at Thandizwe, the school garden has been moved away from the toilets and a separate area for washing pots and plates has been set up away from where the food is prepared in order to prevent contamination of food. Sabelo explains more of the results of the program:

“I make sure I get to school early to pick up litter. We have even planted flowers here to make the space look nicer. Now we teach the other kids not to waste water, and there is no one who litters. Even the youngest children, they know not to drop litter.”

A dishwashing rota has been created so that different children wash their class’s plates each day, reducing the burden on the school cooks. Soapy water bottles are located in each classroom so children can wash their hands.

The spirit of recycling is being fostered with children making toys out of things that they would normally throw away.



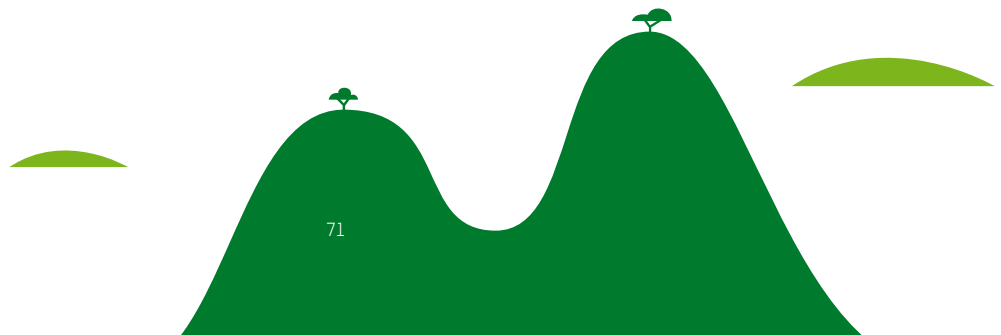
An ambassador at Thandizwe school is Thoko Manzini, a vendor, who walks – with her wares on top of her head – for 30 minutes every day along dusty sand paths to get to the school. Thoko sells fried fish and chips to the hungry school children. She makes just a few rand a day at the school, then continues to sell at home before preparing food for the following day. Thoko is motivated by the hope that she will be able to send her son, who finishes school next year, to university.

Thoko says it is a challenge to remember to ensure that everything is hygienic, but significant changes have been made:

“The major change is the tables. Before we used to sit on the floor to sell, but now we have built these tables, which keeps all the food away from the dirt. If a new member wants to come and sell with us, we tell her that she must build the table first so the germs don’t get in.

Every day I wash out my containers and I make sure that as a vendor I keep myself and my hands clean. I also sell food at home, so I make sure now that there is no litter in my yard and that everyone knows to wash their hands before eating.”

Four cooks prepare a basic meal of pap and beans for the school’s 780 children. Known as *mamas* to the children at the school, the women cook in huge pots over charcoal in the corner of the school grounds. The work is unforgivingly hot in summer when temperatures can reach up to 45°C outside, with high humidity. Yet day after day the *women* walk half an hour or so to reach the school and prepare food for the children.



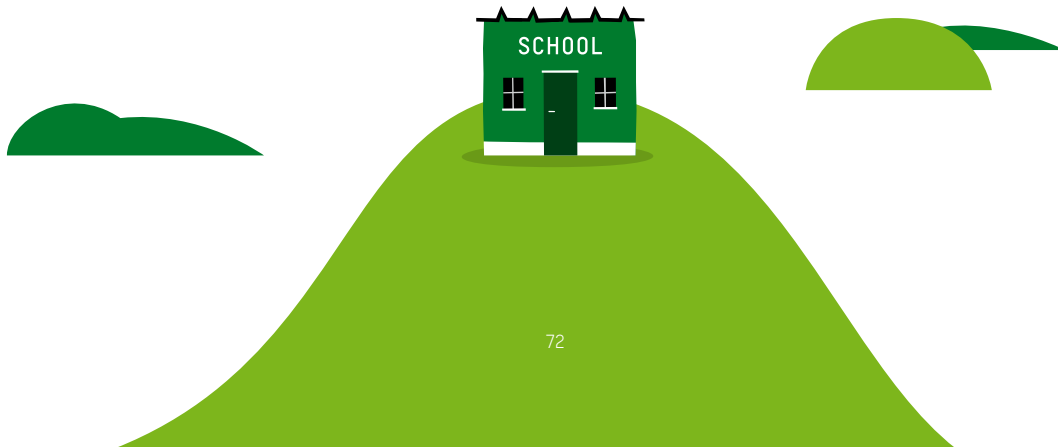
In these conditions, it is crucial that hygienic food practices are stuck to rigidly. Bacteria multiplies in the heat and rotting food will quickly attract vermin. A dirty apron or half-cleaned pot could contaminate the food for whole school in just one lunchtime.

Since increasing her knowledge when she became a TU WASH ambassador, one of the cooks, Bongiwe, is determined not to let that happen:

“I understand how important it is, because if we don’t protect the food, the flies coming from the toilet will spread diarrhoea. Now the cleaners know they cannot just dump leftovers on the ground. They know they must pick up the food and put it in the dustbin. We know we must wash our aprons and regularly wash our pots.”

Bongiwe is taking what she has learnt as an ambassador back home to protect her family too.

“I have a tippy tap at home now too. I just used to have a basin outside the toilet, but now I can see that if everyone cleans their hands in the same water, it will just keep germs passing around.”





Local women wash their clothes in water collected from water storage drums.
PHOTO © Matthew Willman / Oxfam



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