

# Claiming the gains of development

**Trade unions estimate that unemployment is rising by 1 350 people per day in South Africa. Other sources say the underemployed and unemployed now outnumber those with formal jobs. Representatives of the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) spoke to SUE VALENTINE about the need for "development impact" programmes.**

**W**hile well-intentioned development programmes proliferate, all too often they develop only the physical environment but do little to empower communities because they do not serve basic needs such as creating employment and generating income for local residents.

This is the view of two senior technical specialists at the DBSA, Donald MacLeod and Chris Milne, who stress the importance – and the significant benefits – of assessing both the needs and resources of local communities before embarking on any development projects.

They point to various developers who claim to be uplifting the living conditions of people, when in actual fact people in the area are passive observers who do not gain jobs from the process.

DBSA figures for 1987 show 40 percent of construction was undertaken by only seven major companies. Eighty percent of the work was done by members of the Building Federation of South Africa (Bifsa) who it is claimed represent just 20 percent of the number of employers.

Part of the problem, according to Milne, lies in the approach of conventional development models where planning and execution (and ultimately the material benefit) is initiated and negotiated outside of the community where the project is based.

This usually results in only the physical requirements of the community being met whereas if another approach were adopted, many more needs could be addressed.

The conventional approach generally imports external resources to meet the educational, health or accommodation needs of

communities instead of involving individuals in the *process* of identifying and solving the problems of their region.

"This results in the people *watching* a road being built through their area when they could in fact participate in the process and benefit in terms of skills learned and income gained from involvement in the project," says MacLeod.

In the light of all this, MacLeod and Milne advocate a local resource intensive approach. This they say need not be risky and unproductive, and a soundly planned approach in conjunction with communities can be both cost and time efficient as well as a source for generating jobs, income and skills.

However they warn that a labour intensive approach is not simply a means of creating jobs and the panacea to the unemployment crisis; projects must be justifiable.

All important in the process is planning. It is only through close consultation with communities that a meaningful labour intensive strategy can be adopted.

They argue that a job which is planned along conventional lines cannot suddenly be altered to become labour intensive with vast numbers of workers being thrown into the task and expected to keep up with machines

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