

PROFILE ON THE UTHUNGULU COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (UCF) – RICHARDS BAY, SOUTH AFRICA

Overview

The Uthungulu Community Foundation was officially launched on 03 July 1999, as a South African pilot project, after a series of meetings, negotiations or discussions between and among Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation (ZCBF), a local organisation with a track record, Southern African Grant-Makers Association (SAGA), Ford Foundation and some identified community leaders. These consultative meetings had started in 1997. At a later stage, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Rio Tinto Zinc, a Canadian based organisation, and BHP Billiton, a local organisation, came on board. In short, it is precisely these organisations that helped provide either seed funding or technical support for the establishment of the Uthungulu Community Foundation. Without them, the Foundation would probably have had no right of existence or history.

The Foundation's patron, His Majesty, King Goodwill Zwelithini, a committed community developer, performed the official launch, and unveiled a memorial plaque at the official launch. Represented at this launch were local business leaders, traditional leaders, and representatives from local authorities, academics, representative from professional bodies, and nongovernmental and community-based organisations. Indeed, the Foundation, right from its infant stages, continues to have a strong representative support base to discharge its responsibilities.

Networking

The agreement reached between and among the organisations that helped establish the Uthungulu Community Foundation was that the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation (ZCBF) would incubate a Community Foundation, until there was a constitutionally appointed Board of Trustees to decide on the name of the Foundation. At the same time, in April 1998, a steering committee was formed, to provide some strategic direction to the newly established Foundation. Training of members of the steering committee also had to be given some attention. In July 1998, members of the steering committee attended a Ford Foundation sponsored African Philanthropy Learning Initiative in Nairobi, Kenya.

From September to October 1998, members of the steering committee had a tour to the United States, as part of their learning experience of how a Community Foundation has to operate. They visited a number of Community Foundations in the United States, and exchanged views with Community Foundation stakeholders: officials and Board members. Upon their return to South Africa, they had to engage in community mobilisation efforts. They visited local councils and private sector organisations, to explain how a Community Foundation could be supported and used as a vehicle to accelerate required socio-economic development of the Uthungulu (district councils 27 and 28) (sub-regions: Nkandla, Umlalazi, Umfolozi and Pongola) (Zululand) region.

Zululand region

Zululand is the largest of the demarcated regions in KwaZulu-Natal, one of the provinces of South Africa. This region covers an area of 43 000 kilometres. The population of the region totals 2, 2 million people, 90% of which is categorised as rural. The economic scenario of the area is poor. The scenario with regard to health is very gloomy. Government funding for community development projects is severely constrained. Community development projects that do good work in the region quite often close down mainly through lack of funding or lack of long-term strategies to sustain their development activities.

As South is currently undergoing significant changes from its past apartheid history, it is overwhelmingly felt that Community Foundations stand to play a major role in addressing developmental needs of local communities. In this effort, the Uthungulu Community Foundations continues to rely on local residents: private and public sector organisations for support and to sustain its programmes, and remain relevant in terms of addressing the socio-economic needs of local or serviced communities.

Mission

The Uthungulu Community Foundation's mission is simply to harness resources to maintain a permanent endowment fund that enhances socio-economic development of the Uthungulu (Zululand) region.

Objectives

The objectives of the Uthungulu Community Foundation are to:

- improve the quality of life of communities in the Uthungulu region
- establish, promote and maintain a sound community-based capital growth fund that supports community-based organisations
- mobilise community resources and public support for the Foundation's programmes
- instil confidence in communities, through reviving traditional, indigenous philanthropic practices.

Progress and current status

In preparation for its official launch on 03 July 1999, the Uthungulu Community Foundation started appointing office staff in January 1999. In March 1999, the Foundation had a strategic workshop at which stakeholders developed a clear picture of the direction the Foundation was to follow in the road ahead. In July 1999, the Foundation was officially launched, when a ten (10) member Board of Trustees, including its chairperson, was appointed and announced at the official launch. From this date, the Foundation became completely independent of the organisations that had played some role in its establishment. At the Foundation's strategic planning meeting, which Dr Riaan Els of the Fucks Foundation facilitated, in July 2001, duties

and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees and office staff, including the Foundation's director who had joined the Foundation in June 2001, were clearly thrashed out.

On 22 November 2001, Uthungulu Community Foundation issued its first grants to some most needy and deserving communities. The second issue of these grants was on 12 September 2002. The Foundation's patron, His Majesty, King goodwill Zwelithin, hands over the grants to recipients. This is done to highlight the national importance and significance of these grants to recipients. Today the Uthungulu Community Foundation advises almost all nongovernmental and community-based organisations spread all over South Africa on Community Foundations. The Foundation is also currently engaged in talks with government to review or improve existing regulatory operational framework for South African Community Foundations.