

Innovation Orientation: Central Karoo District Municipality

State and non-state role-players in Central Karoo District Municipality (CKDM) increasingly see that innovation can lift development of the district to new heights. Municipalities, private businesses, and community organisations in this district recognise that innovation can add value to the economic and social prosperity of CKDM. This is observed in the number of times innovation is used throughout the strategic documents of the CKDM. One such example found in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2017 -2022; “The Agri-Park should be a network of innovation system which contributes to the achievement of rural economic transformation (RETM)”.

Statements that explain and envision such promising futures accept that CKDM will not become an innovation hub overnight. Making innovation work for socioeconomic change in CKDM requires more than just time. It is critical to know which segments of the local economy to target and how to implement innovative change. Should innovations prioritise farming, renewable energy, or another sector and what are the reasons for this prioritisation? Furthermore, without well-defined developmental goals, the potential benefits of the new ideas, practices and artefacts might never see the light of day.

The weight that innovation occupies in visions of socioeconomic development in CKDM is important and deserves attention. This briefing note explains what it means for innovation to be at the forefront of the district’s developmental visions and summarises key information about how the level of innovation orientation is assessed.

How to do an Innovation Orientation?

Innovation orientation concerns new ways of doing things in socioeconomic development policies and practices and means that stakeholders in development initiatives are able to fully exploit new ideas, practices and artefacts for local economic progress and higher quality of life.

Formal definitions of innovation orientation typically underpin the strategic inclination of an organisation towards building capabilities and processes intended to drive innovation and economic transformation. In other words, the way organisations allocate their resources, hire a certain calibre of employees, or make use of certain technologies, is indicative of their level of innovation orientation.

This working definition makes it easier to do an innovation orientation in practice and using the table (or rubric) below helps determine a municipality’s inclination toward new and improved ways of doing things. How much a municipality favours innovation can be analysed in terms of an awareness and attitude surrounding innovation, measured on a scale with four levels.

The scale (or categories) ranges from Level 0 (red), where there is no to little innovation awareness, to Level 3 (blue) where innovation is firmly established. Each level has a description which sets it apart from the other levels and helps to clarify how an innovation orientation ‘score’ can be interpreted.

Level 0 Little or no innovation awareness	Level 1 Innovation awareness	Level 2 Innovation prioritisation	Level 3 Innovation entrenchment
Little or no mention of innovation or related concepts in municipal documents. Importance of innovation not acknowledged in the municipal documents	Mention and evidence of awareness of innovation in the municipal documents. Importance of innovation acknowledged. However, there is little or no prioritisation of innovation when resources are allocated	Innovation is clearly defined, mentioned frequently, and its importance emphasised. Documents show innovation understanding and prioritisation in terms of resource allocation	Innovation’s importance emphasised, and innovation principles are entrenched in the municipal’s internal and external processes. Resource allocation is informed by innovation and there are incentives for innovation

Table 1: Innovation Orientation Analysis Frame: Level Descriptor

- Collect the maximum number of the latest strategic documents of CKDM before doing an Innovation Orientation analysis for a municipality to ensure a complete and accurate analysis.
- These documents include the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), Spatial Development Framework (SDF) and Local Economic Development strategy (LED). As strategic documents, they guide a municipality and its core responsibilities which include local economic development.
- The next step is an electronic keyword search and analysis of each strategic document. This rapid content appraisal detects if the document mentions the word innovation, and related concepts such as technology, science, knowledge, new or improved methods/ ways.

Keyword content analysis also detects the context these words are used in and the number of times these keywords appear in the document.

- The final step uses the results of keywords extracted to sift it through the analysis frame above to arrive at the municipality's innovation orientation score.

What have we learned?

It was relatively easy to access IDPs for most municipalities. It was, however, a challenge to access the LED plans or SDF frameworks in some municipalities: Either these documents did not exist or were not available from municipalities websites. In the case of the CKDM, all three vital strategic documents were successfully obtained and analysed:

- IDP 2017-2022
- LED Strategy 2019
- SDF: Status Quo Report 2013

The analysis of these strategic documents indicated that the CKDM along with two of its local municipalities, Laingsburg and Prince Albert, are at innovation orientation Level 2 (see Table 2 below). CKDM is well beyond the limited orientation of knowing that innovation is important for LED: innovation is prioritised in the LED Strategy, and these municipalities aim to optimise and make use of innovation in LED interventions. The clear allocation of resources to strategic innovation promotion activities is a positive step and laudable.

However, the appraisal of Beaufort West documents indicated that local municipality is at Level 0 of innovation orientation, reflecting limited awareness of innovation and its potential role in LED. This result is unexpected since Beaufort West can be regarded as the economic hub of the district.

Central Karoo results

Municipality	Innovation orientation level
Laiingsburg LM	2
Prince Albert LM	2
Beaufort West LM	0
Central Karoo DM	2

Table 2. Innovation Orientation (IO) levels, Central Karoo District

What are the learnings for the future?

Although there are clear signs of the importance of new - and improvement on - core functions, there is room for the municipality to go further. This can be done by incentivizing actors (entrepreneurs, businesses etc) outside of the organisation engaged in innovation activities that are aligned with the municipality's identified priorities. Especially if they are addressing a key regional challenge.

Being inclined toward innovation cannot only be reflected on paper but requires action. CKDM should aim to go beyond recognising the importance of innovation toward the actual investments to change the course of LED in the region.

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