

Briefing Note

Fostering innovation-driven local economic development in Ga-Segonyana Local Municipality

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September 2018

Introduction

The Ga-Segonyana Local Municipality was established in 2000 through the amalgamation of Kuruman and Mothibistad Municipalities. The economy of Ga-Segonyana is centered on Kuruman, which is also the economic hub of the John T Gaetsewe district. Kuruman is situated on the main route between Gauteng and Namibia/Cape Town via Upington. This route is growing in popularity because of the unspoilt nature and wide variety of tourist attractions found on the route.

According to the 2011 Census, the Ga-Segonyana has an estimated population of 93 652 people. There is an influx of people, largely attributable to economic opportunities from the main economic activities such as mining and agriculture. Other important economic sectors are tourism and commerce. However, poverty and unemployment levels are high in Ga-Segonyana. The number of people living in poverty is estimated to be 33 735, and the majority of the population are dependent on social grants. About 66% of the population are employed, mostly in the mining sector followed by community services.

This briefing note's aim is to share findings of the Rural Innovation Assessment Toolbox (RIAT) initiative on how innovation can be harnessed to stimulate local economic development in the Ga-Segonyana local municipality. The three complementary tools in the toolbox, i.e., the innovation value chain (IVC) mapping; the participatory evaluation, reflection and self-horizon

exploratory (PERL/SHE); and the potential high impact local innovation catalysts (P-HILICS) tools - were used to assess innovation potential in Ga-Segonyana.

The local innovation landscape in Ga-Segonyana: Evidence from the Innovation Value Chain (IVC) mapping tool

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the North West University conducted a survey during the months of October and November 2016 using the IVC mapping instrument. A total of 87 innovative enterprises were identified in the Ga-Segonyana Local Municipality. The preliminary results indicated that adoption and adaption were the more prevalent innovation activities among the sampled enterprises, while there was little invention. The evidence points towards more vigorous uptake of new ideas, practices and artefacts originally developed by other enterprises, within and outside the local municipality and making improvements and incremental changes to these innovations sourced from outside enterprises to suit local or specific situations. A moderate 62% of sampled enterprises were actively involved in knowledge sharing networks which adopters are most likely to benefit from.

The sampled innovative enterprises were mainly private, and operate in the social services, retailing, manufacturing and agriculture sectors. While most of the enterprises were formal, there was a sizable proportion (10%) of informal enterprises engaged in

Briefing Note

innovation activities. The findings also suggest low levels of science, technology and innovation (STI) policies awareness at the local grass roots level.

The preliminary findings imply that there is huge potential for innovation among the rural enterprises in Ga-Segonyana, especially in terms of adoption and adaptations. This supports the premise that to enhance innovation for socio-economic development, there is the need to increase exposure to new innovations and technologies to the locals. The adoption and adaptation of innovations could be enhanced if access to information about new innovations is increased, the inventions are shown to be profitable to the enterprises and increasing government support for innovations.

Platforms to foster local visions for innovation and inclusive development

Changing the local innovation landscape requires that all local actors work together in crafting a vision, while collectively sharing ideas and learning for harnessing innovation for inclusive outcomes. For that, platforms that encourage networking should be created. Participatory, Evaluation, Reflection Learning/ Self-reflection Horizon Exploration (PERL/ SHE) workshops, are one such potential platform.

Approach/method

A participatory evaluation, reflection learning (PERL)/ self-reflection and horizon exploration (SHE) workshop was held in April 2017. This workshop aimed to provide local actors with a platform to collectively produce a vision for innovation-driven local economic development for the municipality and share ideas on how this vision can be accomplished. A total of 37 local actors participated in the workshop, representing local and district municipal offices, research institutions, local offices of government departments and parastatals, private sector, NGOs and various local enterprises.

A team drawn from NWU and HSRC co-facilitated the workshop using participatory techniques. The discussions led to a selection of several innovative enterprises in the municipality that the participants felt had the most potential to catalyse local economic development. Since the aim was to select two initiatives for further exploration, a weighted set of criteria (evidence of innovation, impact & sustainability of the initiative), developed as part of the RIAT suite of tools, was used to rank these initiatives. The ranking process resulted in the BaOne Intellectual Disability Centre and Digi-Ticket being selected for further in-depth exploration using the p-HILICS framework.

Key insights on self-reflection and horizon-driven social & economic development

The discussions revealed a very good understanding and awareness of innovations and related concepts. The good understanding of the participants of innovation, and their ability to grasp some fundamental ideas on linkages between innovation and LSED, may well be due to the fact that most of the participants who attended the workshop were appropriate for such a session. The workshop was attended by mostly the younger generation, who possessed some level of education. Also, the business forum was also well-represented, which included people with huge innovation and developmental experience in the district.

Innovation was recognised as an important element in improving public sector services and enhancing local social and economic development in the local municipalities. The participants were also able to identify pathways through which innovation can potentially contribute to improving public sector services for enhanced local social and economic development. There was consensus that the people should not only participate in the consumption of the innovation, but should also participate in all the facets and stages of the innovation process. The participants also emphasised the need for the role of universities in linking up with the municipality, private sector and communities to be investigated and interlinkages

Briefing Note

among these different sectors to be optimised. A vision for innovation-oriented local economic development should continue to be crafted, but should involve all actors in the local economy. Emphasis should be on identifying sectors with potential, such as ecotourism.

Catalysing LED through innovative initiatives

Approach/method

The two initiatives, the BaOne Intellectual Disability Centre and Digi-Ticket, were explored further by an innovation steering team that was selected during the PERL/ SHE workshop. The local RIAT networking committee comprised of researchers, LED practitioners, business forum and other local actors. A focus group discussion was conducted involving members of management and the owners of the two initiatives. An interview guide comprising open-ended questions was used to elicit responses about the innovative status of each enterprise. In addition, a guided tour of the business premises helped gain more insights into the enterprises.

Catalytic potential of the two selected initiatives

BaOne Intellectual Disability Centre is a learning centre which offers skills to intellectual kids from special school, which skills the learners subsequently use to produce products that are sold through their co-operative. The activities include crafting, beadwork, sewing, welding and woodwork.

Digi-Ticket is a small business offering technology services such as selling event tickets online, advertisement and booking accommodation online around Kuruman and other nearby towns. The clients download application on the phones or computers and then purchase and pay ticket online, print it and then scan it at the entrance of the event.

Lessons to Promote Local Innovation Dynamism

There is huge potential for innovation and local economic development in Ga-Segonyana. To enhance the innovation potential in the municipality, there is a need to focus on exposing the locals to innovations associated with both the downstream and upstream activities that link to mining activities. This may include the production of intermediate products that are required during the mining process, or activities focusing on the value addition or beneficiation of the minerals. Given that Kuruman, which is located in Ga-Segonyana, is the economic hub in the district, there is a need to develop enterprises focusing on all economic activities along the different value chains.

There is also an urgent need to strengthen local institutions for increased learning capabilities of actors in the local innovation space. The success of innovation growth in the area is dependent upon the current knowledge and learning capabilities, which implies the need to promote the participation of the locals for context-specific innovations. These ideally should build on local/ indigenous knowledge and build the capacity of the locals to engage in future innovations. The BaOne Intellectual Disability Centre teaches us that all the people, including the marginalised such as the disabled or intellectually challenged, if empowered, can play a positive role in local development.

Acknowledgements

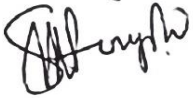
This briefing note draws from evidence obtained during the Rural Innovation Assessment Toolbox (RIAT) initiative funded by the Department of Science and Technology and implemented by the Economic Performance and Development unit of the Human Sciences Research Council as well as the Institute for Rural Development of the University of Venda. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of any other party.

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Briefing Note

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Date: 7 September 2018

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