



Marketing craft through an agency

Beaded pens for conferences.

Photograph: Troy Inman

There are useful ways to link rural and informal crafters with the market and municipalities can offer valuable assistance, as this partnership experience in KwaZulu-Natal shows.

BY DUNCAN HAY

Developing links between the 'first economy' and the underdeveloped, informal and often rural 'second economy' is a challenge shared by government, NGOs and the development sector. Municipalities, in particular, with their responsibility for local economic development, need to come up with creative solutions.

A success story in supporting rural crafters is evident in the uMlalazi and eNdongakusuka municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal, which involved the University of KwaZulu-Natal and EnvironDev, an environmental and developmental consultancy, and funding from a variety of sources including the Fuchs Foundation and Gijima KZN.

The aim is to help producer groups gain access to established markets in the conference, corporate and tourism sectors. With the focus on four areas – marketing, communication, empowerment and mentoring – this approach is a useful one for municipalities to follow.

Rural enterprises are usually small and under-resourced. Even if they have a product the market wants, their size cannot sustain the investment required to get the necessary exposure. In this case, four craft producer groups were assisted with the establishment of a single agency, the Inina Craft Agency, which markets

products on their behalf on a commission basis. The staff of the agency was drawn from the producer groups, making it truly a producers' agency.

This increased economies of scale and allowed for a focus on skills development. The agency has, in effect, become a strategic leadership group for the producers. It also helps source raw material, acts as a distribution and quality control hub for completed products, and processes orders – in short, a one-stop-shop for producers and customers.

Communication was a major problem and the agency makes innovative use of electronic communication and cellphone technology. Located in Eshowe, it has telephones and faxes, the Internet and even broadband. All an agency like this requires is a secure office, a telephone line, a computer and a printer/copier/fax/scanner machine, and people who are computer literate and versed in the languages of established business (English) and of rural enterprise (in this case, isiZulu). The agency is the interface between all players in the production and distribution chain.

There is generally little focus on empowering the first economy to engage the second economy. Recognising that business happens through relationships, direct interactions between the agency staff and large business entities were facilitated. Personal relationships were developed, parties improved their understanding of how the other operates and a foundation for business was established.

There is a significant focus on training and skills development. But this needs to occur within the context of a mentoring process. When a rural entrepreneur is struggling with the intricacies of financial administration, e-mail operation, difficult customers, raw material shortages or other day-to-day issues, there needs to be someone to turn to for advice.

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Woven fibre products with a difference.

Photograph: Tracy Freese



Crafters Thandeka Zulu, Thandazile Magubane and Lillian Mthembu with Inina's woven conference bags.

Photograph: Duncan Hay



Inina beadlers, Thandiwe Mzimela, Victoria Mthethwa, Buyi Sibiyi and Nkonzenhle Nzuzi, making bracelets.

Photograph: Roy Dandala

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