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HIV/AIDS as part of CSR: Approaching the pandemic in a participatory manner

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ABSTRACT:
Since the HIV/AIDS pandemic is taking on catastrophic proportions in Sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, and poses a threat to the county as a whole, businesses should acknowledge and accept their responsibility in combating the disease in order to promote economic stability. HIV/AIDS is threatening the existence of the communities in which businesses are functioning as well as the existence of businesses itself and HIV/AIDS programs should therefore form part of businesses’ CSR programs.

HIV/AIDS is not only a health problem, but in essence a development issue. HIV/AIDS should accordingly be approached as a development issue, by using a developmental theoretical approach. A participatory approach is recommended, since it is proven to be a successful way of handling developmental issues.

1. INTRODUCTION
A study by the South African Department of Health, 2004 (DOH) estimates that by the end of 2004, 29.5% of all pregnant women were HIV positive and that 6.29 million South Africans were living with HIV at that stage (Avert, 2006). In a report by the South African government and Statistics South Africa it is revealed that the annual number of registered deaths rose by 57% between 1997 and 2002. For the same period the deaths for people between 25 and 49 years of age rose with 116%. Although population growth and more refined reporting of deaths might have contributed to this massive rise, this does not explain the huge rise of deaths amongst people aged 25 to 49 (Avert, 2006). A logic explanation for this would be the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This argument is supported by statistics from WHO and UNAIDS (2006) who estimates that 370 000 people in South
Africa died as a result of HIV/Aids in 2003, which means that Aids claimed more than 1000 lives per day.

It is thus not strange that HIV/Aids have been described as the most serious disease to challenge South Africa due to the magnitude and deleterious effect of the pandemic (Ngwena, 2001:42). SAGA (2002:14) states that HIV/Aids poses a potentially devastating effect on "communities, companies, the economy generally and the very fabric of South African society".

Many South Africans have died due to HIV/Aids related illnesses and many more Aids and Aids related deaths are foreseen in the future. It is clear that something needs to be done to combat the spreading of the disease and it is also clear that government alone can not be held responsible for this. As a result of the fact that the disease is posing a threat to the existence of numerous businesses, it is submitted that the business sector should join in the fight against the spread of the disease.

The King report 2002, supports this argument by indicating that non-financial issues such as HIV/Aids have financial implications for businesses. SAGA (2002:9) explains this statement by saying:

>'In South Africa, risks such as those posed by HIV/Aids might be expected to feature largely in any responsible approach to governance. While there is clearly a social benefit to be obtained from addressing the HIV/Aids pandemic, there is also a real economic impact. HIV/Aids will, if left unchecked, cost business significantly, on both the supply (ie employment) and the demand (ie consumer) side.'

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

A number of HIV/Aids programs exist in South Africa. This includes programs initiated by government, businesses as well as NGOs. When one looks at the current HIV/Aids statistics in South Africa for the past few years it becomes clear that more and more people are getting infected with the virus, despite the existence of these HIV/Aids programs. The estimated national prevalence rate under attendees of antenatal clinics
showed a steady increase since 2000. The HIV/Aids prevalence rate increased as follows (Avert, 2006:3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence</td>
<td>24.5%,</td>
<td>24.8%,</td>
<td>26.5%,</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
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Despite the fact that a great deal of time, money and effort are being spent on Aids prevention, it would seem as if these programs are not successful. This statement is based on the fact that the prevalence rate is constantly on the increase as indicated. Working aged people seems to be the group with the highest infection rate and as discussed later in this paper, this fact poses a big threat to the existence of businesses in South Africa.

The problem addressed in this study is therefore the threat HIV/Aids is posing to South African businesses. In order to address the problem it is necessary to determine the objectives of this paper.

3. OBJECTIVES
The objectives for this paper are:

- To argue that businesses must incorporate HIV/Aids programs into their CSR programs, since HIV/Aids is a threat to the existence of businesses
- To show the influence of HIV/Aids on the workforce in South Africa
- To suggest a participatory approach in the combat against HIV/Aids

4. HIV/AIDS PROGRAMS AS PART OF CSR
Before the role of businesses in the fight against HIV/Aids can be discussed, it is important to first discuss why HIV/Aids is seen as a development issue.

- HIV/Aids as a development issue
According to Melkote (2001:428) development can be described as a process where human beings are given access to "appropriate and sustainable opportunities to improve their own lives and the lives of others".
It is important to realize from the onset that HIV/AIDS is more than just a health problem, and thus one can not only treat it as a health problem and expect a successful outcome. Tsafack Temah (2004:3) explains that HIV is threatening the three pillars of development, namely human capital, investment climate and growth and is therefore undermining development itself. He continues the argument by indicating that the pandemic is contributing to the deepening of the gap between developed and developing countries and is thus a full-blown development crisis. The AICC (2006) supports this statement by saying that there is a direct link between HIV/AIDS and the lack of social growth and development. Somavia (2004:V) sums it up by saying: “HIV/AIDS is a human crisis but it is also a threat to sustainable social and economic development”.

According to Somavia (2004:V) the reason why HIV/AIDS is seen as a development issue is to be found in the fact that the loss of life as well as the debilitating effects of the illness is leading to a reduced capacity to sustain production and employment which on the other hand, undermines efforts to reduce poverty and promote development.

The mere fact that HIV/AIDS is a development issue makes it clear that it should be approached as such in order to be successful. HIV/AIDS programs should therefore not be seen as health programs but as development programs.

Government is often viewed as the main benefactor who is responsible for every part of a country's development. Unfortunately, in most Third World countries, such as South Africa, government can not fulfill this role, since it simply does not have the capacity to do so (Swanepoel, 1997:61). Since the functioning of businesses are to a great extend being influenced by development issues, such as HIV/AIDS, they seem as a logical partner in development, especially since they often have more financial and human resources to their disposal than the state. The question that arises can be formulated as follows: What is the role of government and business in development?
The role of government and businesses in development

Swanepoel (1997:56) emphasizes the importance of government in development by arguing that successful development needs a firm government commitment and continues to say that this commitment should be a long-term one, where a climate is set where development can grow and prosper. He argues that the commitment of government must be concretized by:

- **national policy support** where government’s total approach must be focused on development,
- **administrative support** where a committed bureaucracy as a whole is geared towards development, as well as by
- **national planning and programming** where national planning must indicate a central direction in order to reach national policy objectives, while also permitting a degree of decentralized planning.

Although the government has a very big responsibility in development, it is also important to note that government can not alone be held responsible and that business should recognise and accept their responsibility in this regard. Swanepoel (1997:59) agrees with this by saying that policy can only be implemented if one has the capacity to do so. In Third World countries (like South Africa) a gap exists between the formulation and implementation of policy, due to the fact that in most instances government does not have the capacity (ie material, financial, managerial, bureaucratic and technical resources) to implement.

According to Caplan et al. (2001) the role of government should be that of monitoring and regulating, while the business society is responsible for funding and technical contribution. Swanepoel’s description of the “ideal development situation” compliments this, by saying that government should be the *supporter* of development. This means that someone else should initiate and manage development, with the support of the state. It is very important to bear in mind that development should be localized, since development needs would not be identical across the whole country. Because local circumstances should determine local development, local people should take responsibility for
development, while being supported by the state through enabling policy and by providing expertise, infrastructure and some finances (Swanepoel, 1997:62). It thus seems as if local businesses can successfully act as agents of development.

The South African government is trying to encourage good corporate citizenship practices, by actively promoting a social development agenda and putting legislation in place to ensure that the business community assumes much of the responsibility for social development (SAGA, 2002:10).

Businesses must realize that their involvement in developmental issues will not only benefit the society, but will benefit themselves as well. Although it will ask input on the short-term, they will benefit on the long-term. As the King Report 2002 states:

‘In a corporate context, ‘sustainability’ means that each enterprise must balance the need for long-term viability and prosperity – of the enterprise itself and the societies and environment upon which it relies for its ability to generate economic value – with the requirement for short-term competitiveness and financial gain’ (SAGA, 2002:).

An important way in which business can contribute to social development is through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs.

- **What is CSR?**

CSR refers to an enterprise's contributions to society and community that are extraneous to all its regular business activities. This may include, but are not limited to development programs, health, education and training. (Notice 2036 of 2005)

According to Lantos (2001:598) productivity alone is currently not enough to justify the existence of businesses. The influence of wealth generation on non-economic aspects of society, like the environment and the welfare of employees, customers and the community must be taken into consideration. He argues that through CSR, businesses should be responsive to the long term needs of society by minimizing the negative effects and optimizing the positive effects of its actions on society (Lantos, 2001:600).
In order to gain a better understanding of CSR, a model posed by Schwartz and Carroll (2003) will be examined.

The three-domain model of CSR as formulated by Schwartz and Carroll (2003:508) states that businesses have three areas of responsibility, namely economic, legal and ethical. They stress that neither one of the three CSR domain (areas of responsibility) is more important or significant than the others.

The Economic domain focuses on those activities which are undertaken in order to have positive direct or indirect impact for business. This includes maximizing profits and/or maximizing share value. Any activity which is undertaken in order to improve profits and/or share value is regarded as economically motivated (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003:508).

The Legal domain focuses on a businesses' responsiveness to legal expectations from society and the law. This includes compliance with the law, avoidance of civil litigation and anticipation of changes in the law (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003:509).

The Ethical domain focuses on the ethical responsibilities society as a whole, as well as stakeholders expect from business. This includes three general ethical standards, namely conventional, consequentialist and deontological (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003:5011).

As one would expect, the majority of businesses' actions will fall under the economical domain (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003:509), since businesses are formed to make profit. Business would also pay more attention to the legal domain since non-compliance with the law as well a civil litigation may do considerable damage to the organization. It seems as if the ethical domain, although not supposed to be subordinate to the others, are getting the least attention.

At first glance, it would seem as if an HIV/Aids program should fall under the ethical domain, since combating Aids seems like the “right thing to do”. When one considers
the information discussed with regard to HIV/AIDS and the South African workforce, it becomes clear that HIV/AIDS has a very negative financial impact on businesses and that it should therefore be part of the economic domain as well, since it is a way of minimizing organizational expenditure. In South Africa, some legislation with regard to HIV/AIDS in the workplace has already been enacted while more regulations should follow in future. This means that HIV/AIDS programs should be part of the legal domain as well.

According to Schwartz and Carroll (2003:513) the ideal model for CSR is where the three domains overlap and the economic, legal and ethical responsibilities are simultaneously fulfilled. This is exactly where HIV/AIDS programs should be situated, since it has implications for all three domains. In reality this means that all departments of businesses should take part in the planning and execution of HIV/AIDS programs, which is consistent with the generally accepted idea of a multi-sectoral approach to HIV/AIDS.

- **HIV/AIDS as part of CSR**

In a developing country such as South Africa, CSR should play a major role in promoting sustainable development. It is important to remember that the concept of CSR does not only include an organization's relationship with the society in which it operates, but also its involvement in the problems of national significance that face that society (Rensburg, Mersham & Skinner, 1995:77). One of the most important problems of national significance all South Africans are facing is the threat of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This means that even businesses that do not see Aids as a threat to their own existence, has a role in the fight against it.

SAGA (2002:14) argues that partnerships amongst government, business and NPOs are proven to be the most effective way of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. An obstacle to this multi-sectoral approach is the fact that the private sector is globally only doing about 5 percent of what it could be doing (Bery, 2004:17). Bery (2004:17) argues that the business community should pressure and support government to act on Aids and show that HIV/AIDS programs can be successful.
In a study executed by an academic research team from the North West University and Academics from different Universities in the Netherlands (SANPAD, 2006) researchers also found that employees from various types of corporate businesses expected their employers to take responsibility for HIV/AIDS programs in their communities. Employees argued that businesses are not only responsible for the well being of employees *per se*, but also for the well being of the communities in which the organization is functioning.

The controversy with regard to CSR occurs when the CSR activities have a negative influence on profit making (Lantos, 2001:601). A wide spectrum of opinions with regard to the role of businesses in society exists. At one end of the spectrum there are those who see the role of business as basically profit making while complying with the law. In the middle of the spectrum one would find people who argue that businesses should be more sensitive to the impact of their decisions on society, while at the other end, it is argued that businesses should actively be involved in programs that can be beneficial to society, even if it is costing shareholders money (Lantos, 2001:602).

It can be argued that in a developing country such as South Africa, businesses have an even bigger role in development than in developed countries, and should therefore be actively involved in development, even at cost to the organization. However Lantos suggests that “strategic CSR” (2001:618) is considered appropriate for HIV/AIDS programs. He argues that strategic CSR are those activities that are beneficial for both the business and the community. If an organization thus gives something back to the community, it does so by believing that it will benefit the organization as well. It is clear that HIV/AIDS is currently having and will continue to have, a very negative economic impact on businesses. If a company engage in HIV/AIDS programs, it will benefit the community in which it function, but will also, in the long run, benefit the organization itself. Bery (2004:17) supports this view by saying that businesses are recognizing the threat of HIV/AIDS and are becoming part of the fight not only for reasons of good
corporate citizenship, but increasingly because of a comprehensive understanding of corporate self-interest.

In order to proof that involvement in HIV/Aids programs will benefit not only communities but businesses as well, the effect of HIV/Aids on the South African workforce will be examined.

5. HIV/AIDS AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKFORCE

According to the AICC (2006) HIV/Aids usually effects the working-age population and consequently have a negative impact on businesses’ bottom lines. This statement is supported by statistics from the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA) predicting that by 2010 the HIV prevalence under the total population of South Africa will be under 12%, while the prevalence under adults between the age of 20 and 64 (the workforce) will be over 19 % (AICC, 2006).

A study, titled *The South African National HIV Survey, 2005* (Avert, 2006) also supports this by indicating that in 2005 about 16.2 % of South Africans between the age of 15 and 49 (the workforce) were HIV positive, as opposed to 10.8% of the whole population. The study also show that 44% of the total deaths in 2004 were Aids related, while 70% of the deaths of adults between 19 and 49 were due to Aids.

Studies by the WHO and UNAIDS correlates with the above by stating that South Africa would have lost 10% of its workforce to Aids by 2005 and 26% by 2020. The startling implication is that South Africa is losing skilled labour faster than the rate at which people could be trained (WHO & UNAIDS, 2002:1). With the present HIV/Aids prevalence the life expectancy of South Africans decreased by 20 years, form 63 to 43. This implies that the South African workforce may soon consist of young, inexperienced employees who may already be infected with the virus themselves.

The conclusion one reaches after considering all the above statistics, is that HIV/Aids is having a huge impact on the daily functioning of South African businesses. It has been
reported that due to the effect of HIV/Aids, the profitability of 35% of financial services companies, 38% of manufacturers, 46% of transport companies and 55% of all the mines in South Africa have been negatively affected (AICC, 2006).

It seems as if the biggest impact of HIV/Aids had been on labor productivity and worker absenteeism (AICC, 2006). Somavia (2004:V) agrees by saying that HIV/Aids is causing damage to the productivity of the workforce as well as to the efficiency of enterprises in all sectors. It is only logic that when many employees are becoming ill, being absent from work often, not being able to work at all or dies at a young age, it would have a very negative economic impact on businesses.

The HIV/Aids pandemic is threatening the existence of communities, workforce and therefore businesses itself. It is thus clear that businesses should join in the struggle against HIV/Aids since it has a negative financial impact on businesses, it has legal implications for them, it is considered as the ethical thing to do and it is expected of them by the government as well as employees and communities.

Businesses are now being faced with the following question: How should HIV/Aids programs be approached? As argued earlier, there are many HIV/Aids programs in South Africa, but a steady increase in HIV/Aids prevalence indicate that these are not as effective as one may have hoped.

6. A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO HIV/AIDS

One of the possible reasons for the ineffectiveness of HIV/Aids programs in South Africa may be that the pandemic is addressed only as a health problem, rather than a development issue. This statement is supported by SAGA (2002:14) who suggests that it is now generally expected that HIV/Aids is not only a health issue, and that it therefore can not be combated by public health policies alone.

Most HIV/Aids communication strategies are currently based on health education or behavior change models, where it is presumed that the successful delivery of information
will cause individuals to change their behavior (Ford, Odallo & Chorlton, 2003:600). The rationale with regard to HIV/Aids is that once sexually active people understand how HIV/Aids is being transmitted, they will protect themselves by willingly changing their sexual behavior. The problem with these strategies in developing countries is that people may lack the power or motivation to act on the received information when it comes to sex (Ford et al., 2003:600).

Often these people can not choose safe behavior with regard to sex, since they either do not have the option, or they do not view it as relevant to their particular situation. Examples of people in this kind of situation is sex workers who earns a living with sex, woman who (in their specific culture) do not have the power to negotiate with men about condoms, people who do not see any future for themselves and many more (Ford et al., 2003:600).

Information about sexual practices delivered through social marketing campaigns makes no impact on these people, since it has little relevance to their reality. As long as people are not provided with viable alternatives for changed behaviour and they are not provided with skills to apply the information gathered through the HIV/Aids campaigns, the mere fact that they have better understanding of HIV/Aids and its transmission, is of no value (Ford et al., 2003:600). It is thus clear that communication with regard to HIV/AIDS should be approached in a new way. People should be equipped to claim their right to participate in decision making, improved health as well as better opportunities in life (Ford et al., 2003:600).

An effective way of involving communities in decision making about their own lives is a participatory approach. Kivikuru (1999:12) agrees with this by saying that sustainable development can not be reached without participatory communication. A participatory model is therefore suggested in order to facilitate development.
• **The participatory model**

This model emphasizes cultural specificity and participation at all levels of society (Melkote, 2001:432). Development should thus be localized, since different cultures are involved. According to Otto (2004:57) the basic concepts of the participatory model are participation, empowerment, self-reliance and dialogue.

• **Participation**

True community participation in the decision-making process is viewed as the most important success factor in the participatory model. This means that the community that needs some kind of development should be just as involved in the making of decisions with regard to their community, as the people or organizations which intends to help that community develop. In the participatory model, true participation is viewed as an end in itself and the autonomy of local communities is recognized by involving them in decision-making (Otto, 2004:58).

• **Empowerment**

People can only be empowered to do something about a situation once they are aware of a problem and understands the situation. The process of participation can help people gain insight in a situation and provide them with knowledge and skills in order to take action.

• **Self-reliance**

Self-reliance implies that communities should rely mainly on its own strengths and resources in the development process (Servaes, 1995:43).

• **Dialogue**

The role of communication is also emphasized in the participatory model. In the development context it is suggested that communication should not be used as a tool of persuasion, but rather used to create understanding between everybody involved in the process of communication. In the words of Servaes (1995:46): "one is no longer attempting to create a need for the information one is disseminating ... rather, one is
disseminating information for which there is a need". The participatory model suggests that communication should be a bottom-up, two-way process, rather than a usual linear, top-down one-way process.

One important approach to participatory communication is Paulo Freire's view of dialogue. Freire emphasizes that every person is capable of reflecting on, be aware of, expressing, conceptualizing and choosing plans for social action and that all human beings possesses the power to design their own truths and realities (Thomas, 1994:50-51). Freire further believed that a teacher should only act as a catalyst for students to achieve knowledge through his or her own reflective powers. According to Heusca (2001:502) a human being should reach a level of heightened awareness in order to take part in development. This can only be achieved through dialogue, or two-way communication (Waisbord, 2001:442). Dialogue is thus necessary for one to become aware of one's own environment and your relationship with it.

Now that the participatory model was discussed briefly, it is important to discuss what this would imply for businesses’ HIV/Aids programs.

- **The participatory model and HIV/Aids**

As mentioned earlier, this model emphasizes cultural specificity and participation at all levels of society and recommends that development should be localized, since different cultures are involved. The important point to remember is that the mere fact that a specific program proved to be successful in one community, does not necessarily means that the same program will be successful in another community. Since different cultures and different communities see things from a different perspective, it is important to develop every development program uniquely. Different communities might identify different problems in their community and can not be expected to act the same to the same programs.

In order to apply the participatory model to HIV/Aids programs, the basic concepts of the model should be kept in mind. The planners of HIV/Aids programs should thus ensure
that their programs foster participation, empowerment and self-reliance through a process of dialogue.

- Participation

It is of the utmost importance that the people who will be the focus of the HIV/Aids program will be part of the decision making process from the onset of the program. This means that the employees of an organization or the community in which the organization function who will be the “receivers” of the program, are a part of the planning of the HIV/Aids program as a whole. This includes the messages that must be distributed, the channels or media through which these messages should be distributed as well as the outcomes of the program. By involving the “receivers”, one can make sure that their problems are really being addressed, rather than the problems an outsider identified on their behalf, which may differ from the situation as they see it.

One way of ensuring participation is by involving opinion leaders or community leaders in the planning of the program. This is an accepted way of gaining entrance to a community and will make the development agent more trustworthy in the eyes of the community. By firstly making contact with community leaders the developing agent will also get a better understanding of the culture, values and lifestyle of a certain culture and community. As soon as there is a relationship of trust between the developing agent and the community leaders, it would be much easier to get the rest of the community to be part of the process.

Although it would be a time consuming process to facilitate true community participation, it is important to remember that a program can not be successful without the participation of all the involved. It is also important to regard the process of participation as an end in itself, since the community gets the chance to be actively involved in something that can be to their benefit. Through the process of participation the community can adopt new skills with regard to analyzing and solving problems that they can apply in various situations. In this way, the mere participation in the program can be a way of empowering people.
• Empowerment

As mentioned earlier, people can only be empowered to do something about a situation once they are aware of a problem and understands the situation. The fact that a community gets the chance to participate in the planning and executing of a program that will benefit that community as a whole, can empower them, since it can help them to gain insight in their own situation and provide them with knowledge and skills to take action and address the situation. As mentioned above, an important advantage of this way of doing is that the community can use these skills later on in solving other problems that the community might face.

• Self-reliance

In order for a development program to be sustainable the community which is being helped to develop should not be too dependant on the developing agent, since the departure of the developing agent from the community can cause a total collapse of the program. A community should rather rely on its own strengths and resources. One very important role of the developing agent is to help the community discover its own assets, since people are often not aware of their own strengths. When one can help a community realize their own potential, it is also a way of empowering them, since it gives them the strength and confidence to handle their own problems in future.

• Dialogue

As already discussed, the role of communication is of the utmost importance in the participatory model. Communication should be used to facilitate understanding between everybody involved, ie the community and the developing agent. Only through a process of bottom-up, two way communication can the developing agent gain real insight into the particular situation. This process will also help the community to reflect on their own situation and gain a better understanding of their problems and strengths. This is in line with Freire’s views, since the developing agent is not telling people what their problem is or how it should be addressed, but rather facilitates a process where they can discover the problems as well as possible solutions themselves. This also supports Heusca’s views, since people will be able to reach a level of heightened awareness of their situation.
through the process of two-way communication. A process of true dialogue is crucial to the success of HIV/AIDS programs, since it is the only way to make sure that the community and the developing agent really understands each other and understands the situation in the same way. It is also necessary to create trust between all the parties involved.

When all the above elements form part of an HIV/AIDS program, the program has a bigger chance of success than a program that is only throwing information at people that they do not understand or do not regard as relevant to their own situation.

7. SUMMARY

In a country such as South Africa, where AIDS is threatening the existence of the country as a whole as well as of businesses functioning in that country, businesses should accept their responsibility and join in the fight against AIDS. Businesses have a corporate social responsibility towards its employees as well as the communities in which they function and should address the problems facing that employees or communities. Since HIV/AIDS poses such a big threat, it should be part of businesses CSR programs.

The problem businesses are facing in this regard is that HIV/AIDS programs proved to be unsuccessful in the past, since it was approached in the wrong way. The proposed approach to HIV/AIDS as a development issue, is through a participatory approach where the community or employees who are the focus of the program participate in the whole process, be empowered by the process and learn to be self-reliant through a process of dialogical communication. This way the community can reflect on their own situation and the developing agent gains insight in the problems and proposed solution of that community. Only when one really understands a problem form the perspective of the people involved can one hope to succeed with a development program.
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