

The Tlhabologang Experience: Starting with Volleyball

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Tlhabologang is a peri-urban area with 4,000 people. It is situated in the heart of a very conservative right-wing community consisting, primarily, of white farmers. To make things worse the town clerk, responsible for development, is not very popular. One community member described him as a snake and said: *"If we could just get him in a corner and squeeze the truth out of him..."*

The local librarian, however, played a very important role in the development of Tlhabologang. This charismatic person came in contact with the concept and the process of development through NGOs like Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). As a result of his encouragement, a white Community Development Facilitator (CDF) working for the government started to work in Tlhabologang in 1994. He was previously involved in work in sports development and started his development work in Tlhabologang from this angle. He got involved with sport clubs and sport enthusiasts and started to coach the school's volleyball team. He also established an adult volleyball team and organised a volleyball tournament in nearby Lichtenburg with the surrounding towns' teams. The team from Tlhabologang won the tournament and they carried off the CDF on their shoulders. The CDF send the team's manager on a coaching course and this person was then able to take over the coaching.

The CDF then turned his focus to the community's creche. He organised a meeting between the creche teachers and the teachers of the nearby primary school. A syllabus was drawn up to prepare the pre-primary children for primary school. At this meeting the need for a new, larger creche was identified. A further meeting with the creche teachers, parents and the Independent Development Trust (IDT), a funding agency, was held. Five community members were proposed to manage this project. The CDF saw the potential capacity of this group and suggested a community meeting to identify the whole community's needs. This community meeting was organised and the CDF invited his wife to this meeting. With this, he gave something personal to the community and they responded by opening up to him. All their major needs were identified and in a further community meeting the next week, these needs were prioritised and a development committee elected.

One day that summer, some black youths were on their way to Tlhabologang from Potchefstroom, to commemorate Soweto day. On their way to Tlhabologang

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they stopped along the road. When they got off the bus, one person stepped in front of a car and was killed. The driver, a white farmer, saw the group of youths screaming at him and didn't stop, but drove to the nearest police station and reported the accident.

The CDF was not aware of this when he drove into Tlhabologang to deliver the typed prioritised needs and the constitution of the Tlhabologang Development Committee to them. When the visiting group of youths saw him they stormed him and wanted to take their aggression out on him. Fortunately for him the leader of the African National Congress Youth League was present and pushed him into the nearest house. The ANCYL leader resolved this explosive situation by calming the group and explaining the role and presence of the CDF. In the meantime the CDF was smuggled out of the house through a back window and escorted out of Tlhabologang. In a state of shock and disillusioned about community development, he left for his office, wanting to resign.

The next day the CDF phoned the Tlhabologang Development Committee to find out about the reason for such aggression. They apologised to him and invited him back to Tlhabologang for a meeting on the same day. At this meeting they said they felt the community was not yet ready for community development and they decided to focus on the building of the new creche instead as a more limited goal.

The building of the creche progressed well and soon it was time to erect the roof. The Tlhabologang Development Committee could not find a person able to erect this roof. The CDF – an amateur DIY man – volunteered to do this. He asked the community to assist him in this and four labourers volunteered. He gave them training and the work began. With this experiment the climate for development was finally created. Everyday, more and more residents came to look at the new creche and saw the CDF working. With this, trust was built and they supported the CDF. Food and cool-drinks were brought to the CDF and his four labourers.

The CDF used these opportunities to give informal training to the committee and the community at large with topics like communication, community development, conflict management, problem-solving and negotiations, and in return received a very nice suntan and wore out a pair jeans. After this, things started to happen quickly. The community applied for subsidies for building houses from the government, and this was approved. Negotiations with the building contractors brought the following agreement:

- a brick-making yard must be established in the community;
- local labour must be used;
- all excess bricks must be made available for purchase by the community; and
- training must be given in brick-making and building skills.

After this the planning for the building of a production centre for the Iterele Women's Club began as well as the building of a library. All these buildings will be with the bricks from the community brick-yard. This community is now empowered enough to take responsibility for much of its own development. The CDF visits them once a month and they phone him if they need information or assistance.