

# Local government development priorities in developing regions: implications for environmental management – case studies in the Free State Province, South Africa

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## Abstract

Development at Local Government level in South Africa is guided by the formulation of Land Development Objectives (LDOs) which referred to the strategic planning phase of the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process. Legislation determines that each Local Authority should identify and prioritise the most important developmental issues to ensure that the limited resources available are focussed on those aspects that are of the greatest concern to the community at large. Since the LDO process implies a legislative requirement with legally binding outcomes, it is significant to identify the development principles targeted; the aspects reflected in the long-term visions of the towns, and the development issues that received priority. The outcome of the latter will have direct implications for the focus of environmental management. This paper will provide a short overview of the LDO process after which four case studies, representing a range of economic and demographic profiles, will be analysed. The most relevant and pressing local government development issues, identified by the specific communities within the context of a broad understanding of the term environment, will subsequently be highlighted. This will provide a context to realistically implement responsible environmental management practice.

## ONTWIKKELINGSPRIORITEITE VIR PLAASLIKE REGERINGS IN ONTWIKKELENDE STREKE: IMPLIKASIES VIR OMGEWINGSBESTUUR – GEVALLESTUDIES UIT DIE VRYSTAAT-PROVINSIE, SUID-AFRIKA

Ontwikkeling op plaaslike regeringsvlak word deur Grond-ontwikkelingsdoelwitte (GO's) gerig wat as die strategiese beplanningsfase van die Geïntegreerde Ontwikkelingsbeplanningsproses (GOB) beskou word. Wetgewing bepaal dat elke plaaslike regering dié ontwikkelingsvraagstukke wat op die gemeenskap in die breë betrekking het identifiseer en prioritiseer ten einde die beperkte hulpbronne so effektief as moontlik aan te wend. Aangesien die GOB-proses 'n wetlike proses met bindende uitkomst is, is dit belangrik om die geïdentifiseerde ontwikkelingsbeginsels uit te lig, die aspekte binne die langtermyn-visies van dorpe en die ontwikkelingsvraagstukke wat aandag moet kry, te bepaal. Laasgenoemde het 'n direkte invloed op die fokus van omgewingsbestuur in 'n gebied. In die artikel word 'n kort oorsig gegee van die GO-proses en vier gevallestudies, wat 'n verskeidenheid van ekonomiese en demografiese profiele verteenwoordig, word geanaliseer. Die belangrikste ontwikkelingsvraagstukke, soos deur die verskillende gemeenskappe binne die konteks van 'n breë begrip van die term 'omgewing' bepaal, word aangetoon. Op hierdie wyse word verantwoordelike omgewingsbestuurspraktyke binne 'n realistiese konteks geplaas.

## 1. Introduction

The scale of change people have wrought on the earth has been massive, and the effect of this change on our living conditions has been significant and mostly permanent.

Despite technological advances, people remain totally dependent on the earth's ability to sustain them. The challenge is for people everywhere to achieve lives that are as healthy and fulfilling as possible, and at the same time maintaining for future generations the full range and complexity of life on earth. This means the careful management of preservation (or conservation), and exploitation (or development) of resources (Yeld 1997:12). Uncertainty and difference in opinion, however, exists regarding the scope of this management process. The problem is further aggravated by a lack of a common understanding of the term "environment" (Fuggle & Rabie 1983:1 and Barnard 1999:208-209), what could be considered as an inability to contextualise, as well as a focus on significant issues.

Weaver (1998b:4-13) proposes an 'issues-driven' approach to environmental assessment, which implies focussed analytical and management practices. The question arises what these "issues" for different communities are? South Africa has in this regard an added complexity since first and third world developmental challenges co-exist (UWC 2000:8-14). In view of the latter, it would be especially important to realise and understand the developmental issues for communities living in developing regions.

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The fact that all local authorities in South Africa are obliged to formulate Integrated development plans (IDP's) to be implemented over a five-year period, provides an ideal opportunity to evaluate the strategic development planning priorities of communities. It is, however, important to provide a short background to the process as implemented in the Free State province. By virtue of a notice published in the Provincial Gazette (Free State Government 1997) the provincial government required the formulation of LDO's as the strategic phase of the IDP process (in terms of chapter 4 of the Development Facilitation Act (67 of 1995)). The IDP for each local government is guided by the Local Government Transition Act (209 of 1993 and amended) and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000). It is also important to note that public participation, as a legislative requirement, plays a central part in the formulation of LDOs. Although the effectiveness and degree of participation may vary, the LDO outcomes could in the majority of cases be considered a fair reflection of the needs of the specific community. The identified focus for development, determined by the communities, will to a large extent provide a context in which to view future environmental management issues. This is the holistic nature of the process. A need exists to create a common understanding of the term 'environment' in order to limit the complexity.

Four transitional local council (TLC) towns in the Free State Province were selected as case studies in this research. The towns were selected for diversity in the nature of their primary functions and the availability of relevant data. The towns are: the Sasolburg Transitional Local Council (TLC), the Kroonstad TLC, the Bothaville TLC and the Clarens TLC.

## 2. Defining the term 'environment'

The term 'environment' is widely used but has different meanings to different people. The term is often used to describe our life-support systems, namely, energy from the sun, as well as air, water, soil, wildlife, minerals, natural purification and recycling processes (Miller 1998:5). Different professions and academic fields attach specific connotations to the term relating to a particular context. Thus the term "environment" has been used to indicate concepts such as circumstance, situations, milieu, ecology and ecological. It is therefore exceedingly difficult to provide a framework to understand what environmental managers need to consider.

The term 'environment' should, strictly speaking, refer to the relationship between humans and their physical surroundings (Fuggle and Rabie 1983:1-2). South African legislative definitions reflect precisely what Fuggle and Rabie suggests. It is, however, significant to note that two legislative definitions exist within the South African legislative context. The first definition, derived from the Environment Conservation Act (73 of 1989) states the following:

*"[E]nvironment means the aggregate of surrounding objects, conditions and influences that influence the life and habitats of man or any other organism or collection of organisms."*

The second definition is provided by the National Environmental Management Act, (107 of 1998), namely:

*"[E]nvironment means the surroundings within which humans exist and that are made up of –*

- 1) *the land, water and atmosphere of the earth*

- 2) *micro-organisms, plant and animal life*
- 3) *any part or combination of (i) and (ii) and the interrelationship among and between them, and*
- 4) *the physical, chemical, esthetical and cultural properties and conditions of the foregoing that influence human health and well being,"*

Barnard (1999:208-209) contends that the existence of two legal definitions for such a pivotal concept is unsatisfactory. Both definitions, however, refer to the interrelationship between humans and their surroundings and support a broad understanding of the concept, comprising the economic, political, biological and social environments. It is important to realise that environmental management is a framework that allows us to anticipate and address issues at all four identified levels of the environment. The latter implies that the biological environment can and should not be evaluated in isolation as seems to be the case in many instances. This highlights the importance of environmental management as a holistic approach to development. This broad understanding of the term 'environment' implies complex challenges for the evaluation of future development.

## 3. The purpose and legislative context of Integrated Development Planning

In general, South Africa, as a developing country, has limited human and capital resources available at local government level to implement development proposals or to maintain existing infrastructure and services. The Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process is a statutory planning and implementation exercise that aims optimally to utilise limited resources available at local government level. The need for IDP

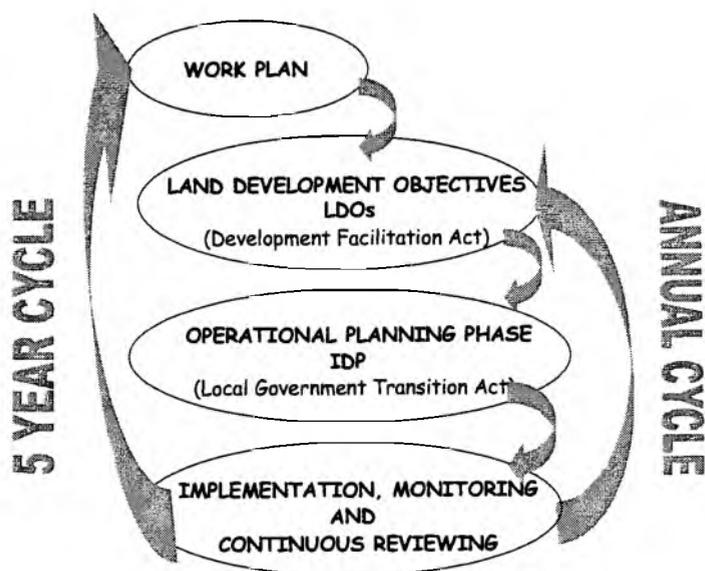


Figure 1: The Integrated Development Planning process (Adapted from DCD 1998).

culminates in the identification of Land Development Objectives (LDOs). The proposals made in the LDOs are implemented during the operational planning phase. Monitoring and review of the process is an annual occurrence while the entire process is repeated every five years (Figure 1). Linkages between the planning and budgeting processes need to take place on annual basis (DCD 1998).

LDOs are thus at the heart of the transformation process of local government and do not only address the traditional responsibilities allocated to municipalities. The focus in this regard is much wider. Local government has to facilitate development of aspects such as health, education, safety and security, environment, etc.

is reflected in the following (DCD 1998:1-5):

- The need to 'right size' local government and redistribute resources
- The need for a clear ideological framework for development
- To nurture democracy
- To improve rapid delivery and improve the efficiency of local government
- To facilitate public private partnerships
- To entrench public participation in decision-making and planning
- Institutionalising performance management
- Promoting local economic development and job creation in the context of a strong poverty-alleviation focus
- Exploiting strategic advantages and potential through strategic spatial development.

The limited human and capital resources available to Local Councils should thus be focussed on those issues that are of greatest importance to the community at large. It should not only establish integration between different spheres of government, but also address the restructuring of local

governance. Legislative principles, underpinning the process, are largely complementary to legislative environmental management principles that include aspects such as sustainability and the optimal utilisation of resources.

The process starts with the formulation of a work plan, which

#### 4. Land development objectives

The identification of LDOs refers to the strategic planning component of IDP and consists of 6 steps as presented in Figure 2 (DCD 1998:15). Strategic planning, in this sense, is defined as a disciplined effort to produce fundamental

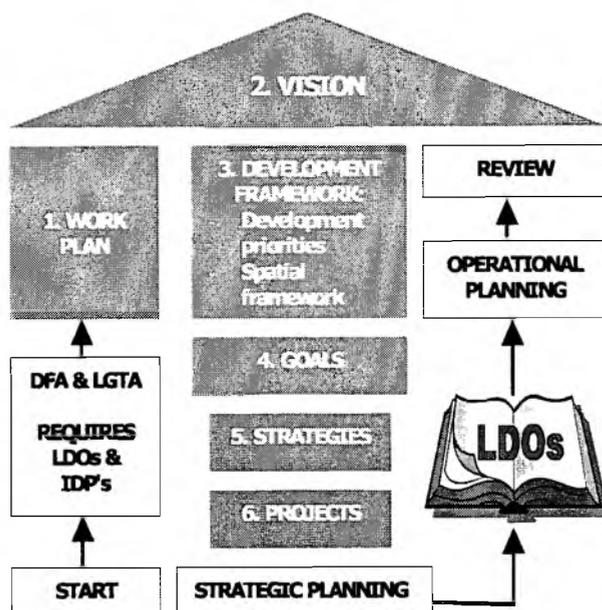


Figure 2: The Identification of Land Development Objectives (DCD 1998).

Table 1: Strategic planning phases

Phase	Level of detail	Description
Work plan	High	The work plan is a document that describes how a local authority will implement the new system of planning in its area of jurisdiction. The work plan is compared to a business plan and addresses the allocation of resources and capacity in support of the planning process. It is intended to serve as a guideline or framework in terms of which the local government body will carry out its mandate with regards to integrated planning.
Vision	Low	A long-term dream of what should be achieved. The desired end state.
Development framework	Medium	This phase entails situational analysis to identify Development Priorities. Resources will focus, in this time frame, on achieving the specified priorities. As a tool, the formulation of a Spatial Framework also provides spatial guidelines for future development.
Development goals	Medium	An expectation of the desired outcome. They are not defined in detail terms and have a medium-term horizon. It should capture what should be done and not how it should be done. The goals are more specific than the vision, but are aimed at realising the vision.
Development strategies	High	The strategies are aimed at realising the goals. The strategy provides the bridge between the present situation and the future result.
Development projects	High	Refer to practical executable projects to be implemented over the short to medium term (5 year horizon).

(Source: DCD 1988).

Table 2: Profiles of identified towns

Town	Dominant function	District location	*TLC area (ha)
Kroonstad TLC	Administrative	Northern Free State	8 173
Sasolburg TLC	Industrial	Northern Free State	4 006
Bothaville TLC	Agricultural service town	Goldfields	1 881
Clarens TLC	Tourism	Eastern Free State	947

(\*Pre 2000 local government election boundaries).

Table 3: Economic profile of the case studies

Town	*Dominant economic sector	*District GGP as % of Free State GGP	#Unemployment rate (%)
Kroonstad	Administrative	4,57	60
Sasolburg	Manufacturing	16,68	58
Bothaville	Agricultural	0,46	33
Clarens	Tourism	3,41	61

(Source: \*Central Statistical Services 1996 / #Local council data 2000).

decisions and actions. It links procedure with actual needs and available resources and emphasises the best use of what is locally available (DCD 1998:5).

The detail implementation actions of the process differ for the various local authorities, albeit that the basic phases remain the same. The process spans a period of approximately one year and requires extensive public participation. Governmental budgeting processes should be aligned with the outcome of the LDO process. *Table 1* summarises the level of detail and provides a short description of each phase of the LDO process.

## 5. Background on the case studies

Each case study reflects a unique character based, among other, on its economic function, which, is a product of various factors including location, size, population, and the like (Northam 1979:19). In order to evaluate a range of towns, it was decided to identify towns representing four basic functions. The towns identified

are listed in *Table 3*. The relevant Work Plans for each town provide a detailed situational analysis (LMV 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d). For purposes of the research, a short overview of the most significant characteristics is provided to create context. The dominant function awarded to each town is based on the classification provided by Van der Merwe (1986:51) and largely reflects the town's economic base. The location of the towns within the context of South Africa is indicated in *Figure 3*.

Kroonstad was established in 1855 and since then, has developed as a focal point in the Northern Free State. The town is situated approximately 60 km east of the Free State Goldfields, 220 km from Bloemfontein and 180 km from Johannesburg. The N1 National road linking the south with the north of the county runs through Kroonstad. The town is also located at one of the largest railway junctions in South Africa. The latter emphasises the ideal and strategic location of the town. The greater Kroonstad is the third largest town in the Free State and has approximately

189 007 inhabitants (*Table 4*). It is the administrative centre of the Northern Free State region (LMV 2000b:6).

Greater Sasolburg is rightfully labelled as the industrial capital of the Northern Free State and is located in the heart of world-renowned coal fields. This modern industrial town is located in close proximity (20 km) of the industrial areas of Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark. The town is 340 km from Bloemfontein and 80 km from Johannesburg and the Johannesburg International Airport. Three major ports, namely, Durban, Richards Bay and Maputo can be reached by road and rail within 6 hours. Apart from the internationally known SASOL 'oil-from-coal refinery', a vast number of by-products including olefins, waxes, alcohols, tar products, inorganic chemicals, rubber, gases, plastics, fertilisers, etc. are manufactured in the area (LMV 2000a:6).

Bothaville is situated in the Goldfields-region of the Free State, approximately 80 km north of

Welkom and 200 km south-west from Gauteng. The town of Bothaville was established in 1891, after a church for the surrounding farming community was erected on a farm called Botharnia. The Volksraad (the parliament of the former Orange Free State Republic) acknowledged the settlement and the town were called Bothaville. The economy of the area is largely dependent on agriculture and most industrial activities are agriculture related. Owing to the prominent maize production in the region, the town is also called the 'Maize Capital of South Africa' (LMV 1999a:6).

The scenic town of Clarens, often referred to as the "Switzerland of South Africa", is situated in the Eastern Free State region, approximately 34 km south-east of Bethlehem, 250 km north-east of Bloemfontein and approximately 70 km from Harrismith. Clarens is a mere 20 km from the Golden Gate National Park. Approximately 5 745 inhabitants reside in the greater Clarens (*Table 4*). Clarens was laid out in the foothills of the Rooiberge

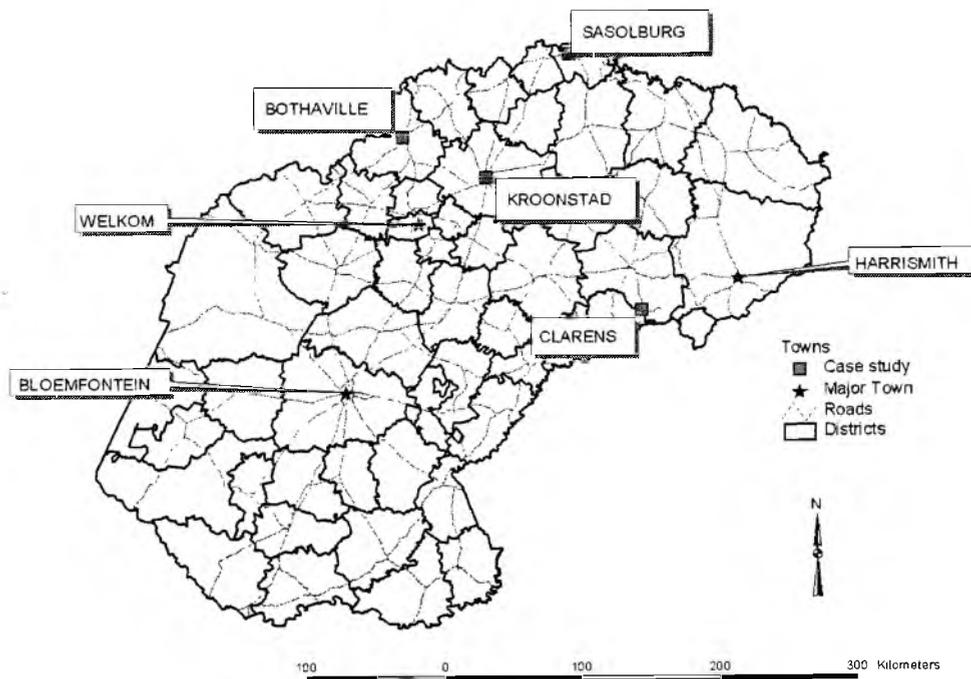


Figure 3: The location of the cases studies in the Free State province.

Table 4: Demographic profile of the case studies

Town	*Population (2000)	*Approximate growth rate (%) (1991-1996)	#Estimated population 2005
Kroonstad TLC	155 350	4	189 007
Sasolburg TLC	126 847	7	167 032
Bothaville TLC	59 000	4	74 654
Clarens TLC	5 745	4	7 269
<b>Total</b>	<b>346 942</b>		<b>437 962</b>

(Source: \* Local council data / # Based on indicated growth rate).

Table 5: Status of the case studies in terms of the IDP process (July 2000)

Town	IDP process										
	Strategic Planning Phase – LDO							Operational Planning Phase			
	Work plan	Vision	Development properties	Spatial framework	Development goals	Development strategies	Development projects	Financial plan	Communication plan	Implementation plan	Institutional plan
Kroonstad	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	-
Sasolburg	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	-
Bothaville	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Clarens	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	-

(√: Phase completed).

in 1912, and was named after the town in Switzerland where Paul Kruger (president of the *Zuid-Afrikaanse* Republic) spent his last days in exile. Since a large number of the existing houses in Clarens are mainly holiday homes, the number of residents varies, depending on the holiday season. The community is situated 10 km from the Lesotho border and has a splendid view of the Maluti Mountains. Clarens is surrounded by spectacular sandstone

rock formations and is well known for a wide variety of scenic and tourist attractions. The town also forms part of the Highlands Route, which has of late become a renowned tourist attraction (LMV 2000c:6).

### 5.1 Economic profile

Northam (1979:111) utilises six different classification criteria in terms of the economic components of towns. For purposes of the research, two of these criteria are evaluated in

order to create context in terms of the economic status of the different towns, namely, the District's Gross Geographical or Domestic Product (GGP or GDP) and the unemployment rate as reflected in *Table 3*.

From *Table 3*, it is clear that the dominant economic sector correlates with the dominant function of the towns, except for Clarens where the agricultural sector in the region outweighs tourism. The high level of unemployment is a major factor influencing developmental decisions and it might be expected that this could be reflected in the development priorities of the various towns.

### 5.2 Demographic profile

A demographic profile is provided to give insight into the scale of difference between the towns. It is, however, exceedingly difficult accurately to extrapolate population figures since various unknown factors such as AIDS, migration patterns, urbanisation, and the like might still significantly influence the demographic profile.

## 6. Status of the Case Studies in terms of the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) Process

It is important to realise that the IDP process is a new procedure which, for the first time, required public inputs in local developmental decision making. In this regard the prioritisation of development issues by the community is also a first. *Table 5* provides a summary of the status of the various case studies determined for July 2000 in terms of the IDP process provided by LMV (Pty) Ltd and the Spatial Planning Directorate, Free State Province.

It is evident from the above that only Bothaville, as a National Pilot Project, completed the operational planning phase of the IDP Process.

Table 6: Community-preferred principles reflected by the case studies

Town	Community-preferred principles with direct environmental relevance
Kroonstad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The promotion of desirable development in keeping with the intrinsic environmental features and ecological systems and <b>restriction of environmentally harmful developments</b> within the Greater Kroonstad</li> <li>- The <b>Vais River</b> as the most prominent natural resource should be protected to minimise pollution. Exploitation should be preceded by <b>Environmental Management Programmes (EMP)</b>, where applicable and mining permits (by virtue of Section 9 of the Minerals Act, Act 50 of 1991) to ensure preservation and <b>sustainable exploitation</b></li> <li>- The <b>participation</b> of the community is evident in decision making but also during the planning phases to identify the critical issues and problems experienced by the community. Adequate involvement of the community will subsequently ensure information sharing and the empowerment of the community.</li> </ul>
Sasolburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Sustainable utilisation of renewable resources</b> with special reference to the Vaal River.</li> </ul>
Bothaville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Properly planned small-scale farming development, which does not have a negative effect on the <b>environment</b></li> <li>- Development preferences should be <b>sustainable</b> in the long run.</li> </ul>
Clarens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Future development should not have a negative effect on the existing <b>rural character</b> of the area. This rural character is instrumental in the development of the tourism potential of the area</li> <li>- The importance of <b>sustaining the ecology and natural environment</b> should guide decisions on future development of the Greater Clarens. The natural environment plays an important role in <b>eco-tourism</b> development in Clarens</li> <li>- Development in Clarens should enhance the <b>existing scenery and aesthetics</b></li> <li>- As part of the tourism initiative for the future development of the town, scope should be allowed for <b>unique cultural</b> and artistic related development initiatives.</li> </ul>

(Sources: LMV, 1999a, 2000a, 2000b & 2000c).

The other towns have completed their LDOs and will commence with the operational planning phase as soon as the LDOs are legally approved by the relevant authority (in this case, the Free State Provincial MEC for Local Government and Housing).

Subsequently, the outcome of the strategic planning phase can be evaluated to determine trends in developmental thinking.

### 7. Identified community development principles

During the LDO process, the community identified certain community development principles that should provide guidelines for developmental decision making by the relevant council. Ideally these principles have to be approved and implemented as council policy. The principles are the result of various public workshops and participation meetings, according to a structured participation process outlined in the respective council's

From these principles, the following conclusions may be formulated:

#### *Applicable to all towns*

- It is significant that all the towns embrace the principle of sustainable development
- The biological environment and its importance to a conducive living environment are specifically highlighted. This also implies consideration of a broad interpretation of the term environment
- The man-environment interaction is reflected in the principles
- Water resources are specific environmental assets to be managed responsibly. Northam (1979:95) confirms the latter and also identifies rivers and water resources as a significant environmental component to urban areas in general, which requires special management actions.

#### *Kroonstad*

- Only Kroonstad specifically refers to community participation as an important principle to development
- Rivers and water resources are major environmental assets that need to be protected, with specific reference to the Vals River in the case of Kroonstad
- Certain sustainable development tools such as Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) are proposed to assist in decision making with regard to the utilisation of resources.

#### *Sasolburg*

- The location of Sasolburg, with its industrial function adjacent the Vaal River, implies significant pollution potential for renewable resources. In light of the latter, special emphasis is placed on the sustainable utilisation of renewable

Table 7: Visions of the case studies

Town	Vision	Evaluation
Kroonstad	To be a role model of an integrated society, developing optimal facilities with regard to the upliftment of all our people and to ensure a safe and investment-friendly environment	-
Sasolburg	The Greater Sasolburg will be an integrated, prosperous and exemplary society as part of a global community providing high quality of life through the expansion of its economic base and responsible utilisation of renewable and non-renewable resources to create a self-reliant and sustainable economy	① ②
Bothaville	To develop an integrated town that is recognised as the maize capital of South Africa, which, in turn, will enhance the quality of life for all its inhabitants, based on high standards and self-reliance	②
Clarens	Clarens, tourism jewel of the Eastern Free State, and situated in a scenic and ecological healthy valley, will be a sustainable town, nurturing her rural character to enhance the quality of life of her residents	① ②
① Broad definition of the term environment considered ② Concept of sustainability considered ③ Public participation considered		

resources as a development principle. It is further realised that the economy of the town might in future depend largely on renewable resources replacing the non-renewable resources, such as coal.

#### *Bothaville*

- The sustainable utilisation of agricultural resources is of utmost importance to the community since it provides in the livelihood of the town. The latter not only refers to the commercial farmers, but also to small-scale farming projects as specifically indicated.

#### *Clarens*

- The rural character and natural beauty of the region provide the most significant future development impetus for the town, which is based on its tourism potential. This reflects a special emphasis on the sustainable long-term utilisation of the natural environment.

environmental management principles into developmental decision making at local government level. Except for the principle of public participation, it seems in general as if a genuine effort was made by the community to ensure that consideration for the environment in its broadest sense is incorporated in developmental decision-making principles for local government.

#### **8. Long-term development focus reflected in the visions of the towns**

The visions provide a general long-term development scenario to be achieved. It is significant to mention that the Visions are also a product of extensive public participation managed by an independent facilitator. Detailed insight into the current realities of the local authority, with specific reference to the economic status, was, however, provided prior to the formulation session to ensure that the vision was based on realistic expectations within the capacity of the relevant local authority. A set vision, without the required resources to ensure action, remains only a dream for the community and leads to frustra-

tion and instability. In order to analyse the visions of the towns, the following questions could be asked as reflected in *Table 7*:

- Was a broad definition of the environment adequately considered as part of the long-term development of the town?
- Was the concept of sustainability incorporated?
- Was consideration given to the role of public participation?

The following conclusions were arrived at:

#### *Applicable to all towns*

- None of the visions referred to the involvement of the community to initiate development
- The improvement of the quality of life of the residents is a central theme highlighted by the visions of all the towns. This approach emphasizes the importance of the social element of the environment
- Kroonstad and Bothaville failed to emphasize the link between the different elements of the environment to

From the above, it is clear that community development principles could serve as a vehicle to incorporate

Table 8: Development priorities of the case studies

Elements of the environment	Development priorities	Kroonstad (LMV 2000b:17)	Sasolburg (LMV 2000a:18)	Bothaville (LMV 1999a:14)	Clarens (LMV 2000c:14)
E	Infrastructure / Maintenance	√	√	√	√
E / S	Housing	√	√	√	√
E	Job creation & economic development	√	√	√	
S / P	Community participation & capacitation	√	√		√
S	Education			√	√
S / B	Health & medical services			√	
S	Community facilities & social services	√			
S	Safety & security		√		√
E / B	Tourism development				√
E / P	Collection of rates, taxes & income generation		√		
E	Regional services development	√			
E	Development opportunities			√	
E = Economic environment S = Social environment B = Biological environment P = Political environment					

achieve upliftment. Sasolburg and Clarens have a broad focus, successfully linking the biological, economic and social elements of the environment.

**Kroonstad**

The vision for Kroonstad largely reflects the social and economic environment, with no reference to the biological environment. The vision lacks a holistic approach and broad definition of the term environment.

**Sasolburg**

Sasolburg reflects a broad con-

cept of the environment and incorporates the concept of sustainability.

**Bothaville**

- If it is accepted that self-reliance and sustainability could be synonymous, it might be argued that Bothaville did incorporate the concept of sustainability. The vision, however, places specific emphasis on the social environment with no reference to the man-environment relationship.

**Clarens**

- The long-term tourism potential

of Clarens ensures that the vision for the town reflects the importance of a healthy environment to facilitate economic development and better living standards.

In general, the visions are not contradictory to environmentally responsible development and thus will allow for the successful consideration of the environment in the long-term development of the towns. It is, however, significant to note that the social and economic environments receive special emphasis. The upliftment of the community through improvement of living standards may be identified as the central theme of the different visions.

**9. Development priorities identified**

The new system of planning emphasizes the need to focus resources on the most important issues facing the relevant community. Alleviating poverty through economic growth seems to be the basic point of departure. In this regard the provision of basic services and the improvement of living conditions are the most important. Table 8 provides a summary of the development priorities of the case studies in order to determine which elements (referring to the economic, social, political and biological) of the environment received priority status. Based on the visions of the respective towns, it could be expected that the emphasis would be on the social and economic environments.

The following assumptions may be made from Table 8:

It is evident that the economic and social environments received priority with no direct reference to the biological and political environments. This correlates with the visions of

the towns where the improvement of living standards of the community was emphasised.

The assumption can be made that economic development as an overall objective is seen as a means to achieve better living standards. This is supported by the fact that job creation and economic development were identified as development priorities in three of the towns. The biological environment and its conservation are perceived as a luxury in view of the other 'more important' development challenges. The lack of a clearly stated priority on so-called 'green' development initiatives is testimony of the latter. Community Principles for development, however, indicate that sustainability should accompany the drive for development. The provision of housing and infrastructure are priorities for all the towns. In relation to the economic status of the towns, this could be expected. Public participation and its incorporation in development decision making is a significant feature incorporated by three of the towns. This approach supports the notion to include the community through participation in environmental management initiatives.

From the above, it is clear that the development of local communities focuses on addressing basic needs through economic growth. The majority of the priorities identified, addressed either the economic or the social environment. When the economic profiles of the towns are considered, the latter is hardly surprising. The biological environment is seen as a resource to be utilised in order to facilitate economic growth. Preservation or conservation of the natural

environment would only be considered if the social and economical environments benefit from the latter, as is the case with Clarens. It could thus be stated that the so-called 'brown issues' received priority over the so-called 'green issues' when decisions on development were taken at local level. Weaver (1998a:1-2), supports this notion, identifying this as one of the most important environmental management challenges facing developing countries.

## 10. Conclusion

According to legislation, environmental management aims to address a broad definition of the term environment. The outcome of this paper indicates that the majority of development priorities identified by local communities refer to either the economic or the social elements of the environment. The focus of development will therefore be on human development and the upliftment of communities, facilitated by economic growth. The latter is hardly surprising in view of the serious challenges facing human and economic development in developing countries. Pressing everyday needs of the present community mask the important role played by a healthy environment to achieve better living standards. The implications of the latter are far-reaching for the implementation of environmental management.

The biological element of the environment does not enjoy as much attention as the social and economic aspects. It could thus be stated that the biological environment and the preservation and/or responsible utilisation thereof should always be considered in terms of its implications for the social status and economic improvement of the local community. Attempts to focus solely on biological importance will not

ensure effective implementation practice. This is particularly true in view of the legislative requirement of public participation. Environmental management practice should thus endeavour to ensure that development initiatives are given the best possible chance of succeeding within responsible limits.

A 'go/no go' approach to development would not be effective in a developing country scenario. In order to ensure that environmental management remains relevant to developmental processes, it is imperative that environmental legislation and procedures relating thereto be streamlined to ensure effective and prompt decision-making. Lengthy, time-consuming and expensive processes will not contribute to development and will lead to resistance from communities to its implementation. It may be expected that sustainable development tools such as Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) might in future play a more important role in ensuring relevant and issues-focussed decision-making:

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