

The Importance of Collaboration: Environment, Jobs, and Health in Pietermaritzburg

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The relationship between environment, employment and health is widespread and incredibly complex. The interplay with these key areas impacts the daily living conditions in the community I am currently working in. The intersection is particularly evident in the children of the local households who attend Slang Primary School. From drastic climate change, high unemployment rates to the lack of medical care available these issues create an interlocking set of challenges that require a cross cutting approach. This reflection of my experience draws on three of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals: Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water for all; Decent work and economic growth; Good health and wellbeing.

Currently in the Pietermaritzburg area the water dam that supplies water is well below 50 percent. The drought in the area has continued for months during the summer and now into the winter. Access to water is cut off first to township areas where low-income black households reside. Middle-class neighbourhoods and wealthy areas are the last areas where water is cut off during the drought. The environmental racism that persists in South Africa is blatantly evident in lack of water access for poor and middle-class households, which are predominantly black. The complexity of location is also an important factor where rural areas have even lower access to water. While South Africa is a dry country where already water is a precious resource, climate change and its impact on the country cannot be underestimated. When there is no water at Slangspruit Primary School it is shut down and learners miss out on the learning from the classrooms which puts these children at a greater disadvantage of being behind in their education and from an impoverished community.

Unemployment is very high throughout South Africa and in particular among people living in townships. Slangspruit Primary School is located in such a township where many people work in either low-paid jobs or do not have work. The lack of jobs and low wage work that is available is symptomatic of a deep structural need for decent work that can contribute to sustainable economic growth. Communities that have working labour forces that are paid decent and livable wages are integral to the health of households. Many of the households that Slang learners come from struggle to get by and meet their basic needs such as buying food, adequate housing, paying electricity bills, school tuition fees, clothing and the list continues. Without employment opportunities many already disadvantaged people living in townships which are already underserved, are marginalized even further without access to the labour market.

Good health and wellbeing is where communities can live their daily life as one sees fit in terms of their spiritual, emotional, mental and physical selves. The concept of Ubuntu is understood as human kindness towards others, which is a universal connection

with one another. It is important to note how wellbeing must be defined and measured by the community itself. Healthy communities need to have access to the resources that they need to continue working towards and maintaining their wellbeing. Interestingly, Pietermaritzburg has over 900 non-governmental organizations. This is an enormous number given the size of Pietermaritzburg itself. The momentum of over 900 organizations working in development is inspiring but also calls into question rather there is collaboration happening amongst different sectors of development. While development is a vast field with many different sectors it ultimately is about providing opportunity for people and their wellbeing.

While it is clear there is lots of momentum for change in South Africa in providing opportunities and making space for vulnerable communities, collaboration among development organizations is needed for a comprehensive approach that works from an environmental, socially just labour, and a wholistic health focus. The learners at Slang Primary school are the future generation who will be experiencing the changes in climate and will need access to good jobs for their own growth and development.