

SMMES AND STAKEHOLDER CONTRIBUTION TO A GREEN ECONOMY IN KZN: TOWARDS A GUIDELINE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

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ABSTRACT

SMMEs (including cooperatives, PTY Ltd, Close Corporations) are viewed as a significant driver of job opportunities and economic value creation; in the context of green economy, these value propositions would entail diverting waste away from landfills. Municipalities by virtue of their constitutionally mandated 'gatekeeper' status being responsible as policy regulators of waste management activities have a tricky relationship with SMME. Unfortunately, public sector stakeholders, in particular municipalities, were reported by The dti (2012) and other authors to be unaware of the main issues that need to be considered for the sustainability of SMME programs. These issues are important for South Africa's transition to a green economy. Preliminary findings of a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal revealed that sustainability of SMMEs programs is influenced by the SMME and stakeholders *track record or experience*, whether the participants have a *local foot print*, whether the participants *understand the strengths and weaknesses of their chosen business model*, how the program and participants *grow and expand* (i.e. a top down approach or organically), a basic knowledge of *financial and operational management* requirements, if there is *accountability on promises*, if there is *passion* for the program, and through *constant review* of these associations. Against this backdrop, we suggest a guideline or key issues that municipalities or private sector stakeholders should consider in supporting SMMEs during the transitioning to a green economy.

KEY WORDS: SMME, Solid Waste Management, Program, Guideline, KwaZulu-Natal

1 INTRODUCTION

Greening the economy requires a new development path, which enables job creation, to unlock a desirable and innovative low carbon economy with new growth opportunities. This is especially relevant in a post-COVID-19 situation to rebuild the economy. New and innovative small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) can often act as agents of change in the economy, introducing new products and services and demonstrating increased efficiencies in the way they operate. Furthermore, there is an important link between new business and SMME activity, job creation, and economic growth (OECD, 2010). South African policy on greening the economy includes SMME development as a vehicle to transition to a green economy, in line with international experiences.

The South African government decided to capitalise on the opportunities in the waste sector to address high unemployment (Elagroudy, Warith and Zayat, 2016) while transitioning to a green economy. The 2011 National Waste Management Strategy (Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), 2011) is a case in point. It set a target of 2600 additional SMMEs and cooperatives participating in waste service delivery and recycling by 2016. The implementation of this new development path requires an enabling environment for municipalities to engage with the private sector and especially SMMEs in the waste and recycling sectors in South Africa. Evidence suggest that cooperatives in the waste sector have a 92% failure rate. Godfrey et al (2015) reported on reasons for the failure of the cooperatives and therefore our focus is on other types of SMMEs. While

conducting research on SMMEs and the organisations that support them in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), it became apparent that municipal officials are not aware of key criteria, which should be considered for the implementation of SMME programmes in the waste and recycling sectors in South Africa.

The next section provides an overview of the general requirements for transitioning the waste sector to a green economy. This is followed by some of the initial findings from a CSIR study in KZN looking at the involvement of SMMEs in greening the waste sector. Lastly, a number of key factors which should be considered, are presented.

2 GREENING THE WASTE SECTOR

International experience suggests that the requirements for greening the waste sector include: financing, economic instruments policy and regulatory measures and institutional arrangements (Elagroudy et al, 2016). According to Elagroudy et al, (2016), municipal plans and budgets should support the transition to a green economy and allow for private sector involvement. Policies and economic regulations should enable the development and adoption of technologies to unlock economic opportunities embedded in municipal solid waste. Examples include setting of cost reflective tipping fees, coupled with public awareness campaigns, and enforcement against illegal dumping. The importance of holistic management for solid waste is emphasised. Furthermore, it is important to recover costs from improved waste management to reduce the financial burden of municipal waste management on municipalities. Private sector involvement in waste management has the potential to reduce cost, enhance service delivery and provide additional benefits to the economy (Elagroudy et al, 2016) while SMMEs also have the additional ability to introduce new innovative business practices to increase efficiencies. Finally, economic instruments can act as incentives to support the transition to a green economy.

This section provides a brief overview of the relevant policies and strategies in South Africa to support the green economy. The focus in this section is on SMMEs and job creation in the waste and recycling sector.

2.1 National Development Plan 2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) outlines South Africa's development path to 2030, as envisaged by government (National Planning Commission, 2012). In addressing the country's development challenges, the NDP places great emphasis on the need to ensure environmental sustainability and the role of green products and services in contributing to the creation of jobs, the alleviation of poverty and a just transition to a low-carbon economy (National Planning Commission, 2012). The NDP includes some key points with respect to transitioning to a low carbon economy, including: the need to invest in skills, technology and institutional capacity; the introduction of a carbon price; the need to create greater consumer awareness; and the development of green products and services that will contribute to job creation in niche areas where South Africa has or had the potential to develop competitive advantage (NPC, 2011). With reference to waste management, the plan talks to a number of issues including an absolute reduction in waste disposed to landfill. Also mentioned is an increase in renewable energy contribution to the national energy mix, which biogas from organic waste, and landfills could contribute towards. There is some recognition that opportunities exist in other sectors for waste management including the manufacturing sector. There are also opportunities for local municipalities to come on board to address service backlogs and better manage open waste sites. This is to be achieved through ecosystems protection, full cost accounting, strategic planning, and being opportunity-focused.

One of the criticisms of the NDP is that it does not sufficiently address the issue of integrating economic growth with environmental sustainability considerations. In this respect it does not place enough emphasis on supporting green finance models and green industries, and a key gap is green policy design (Cwele, 2019).

2.2 Green Economy Accord (2011)

The Green Economy Accord is an agreement under the National Growth Path that was signed by South African government, organised labour, business and civil society in November 2011. It is a

collective commitment by 18 different ministries to pursue a green economy (ASSAF, 2014). The Accord identifies a number of current technologies, but also mentions the role of innovation and the requirement for capital investment to bring new technologies to market. The need for a **localisation** strategy that would assist in creating local industrial capacity, local jobs and local technology innovation was highlighted (ASSAF, 2014). Specific commitments include, investment in green economy; procurement of renewable energy as part of the energy mix; and promotion of biofuels for vehicles, among others.

2.3 Presidential Jobs Summit

A framework document between NEDLAC Social Partners (i.e. government, business, labour, community) was produced by the Presidential Jobs Summit (South Africa, 2018). Specific recommendations with regards to the waste economy were made. These were specifically targeted at beneficial use of household/commercial waste, bulk industrial waste and beneficial use of coal ash. Other opportunities in different sectors were also described. All of these in some way or another are dependent on the participation and buy-in of local municipalities. Specific interventions are mentioned in the framework document for organic, construction and demolition (C&D), e-waste and packaging waste (for plastic, paper, metals, and glass), ferrochrome slag and coal ash residues. There is a role for local municipalities to play in these projects.

A key criticism and some potential hurdles for the job summit is unrealistic growth expectations¹, stagnant business growth, net job creation, small business survivability as was identified as a critical factor in the National Development Plan (Hassen, 2018). Another potential challenge mentioned by the author includes a fixation on large businesses.

2.4 Operation Phakisa for Chemicals and Waste Economy

Operation Phakisa² launched in 2014 as a Presidential initiative to fast track the implementation of solutions on critical development issues of the NDP. These include opportunities in the oceans economy, health, education, mining, biodiversity, agriculture and lastly the chemical and waste economy. The main objectives (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2017a, 2017b) for the various laboratory style interactions with the stakeholders included a need to achieve ownership of targets by the different stakeholders, an understanding of the main objectives, setting targets, proposing solutions and sign off.

2.5 National Waste Management Strategy 2020

SMME, job creation and diversion of waste from landfilling are key focus areas of the latest national waste management strategy (Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, 2020). The role of municipalities is recognised especially in the formalisation of the informal economy, which can improve livelihoods and working conditions for this sector. The 2020 strategy document revises some of the targets from the previous 2011 national strategy. In relation to jobs the new strategy proposes 500 new jobs by 2024. This is in contrast to 69 000 new jobs in the 2011 strategy (Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), 2011). Unfortunately, there has been little progress (~30%) towards achieving the previous targets. The new jobs created were mainly in the Extended Public Works Programme and the Working on Waste Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programmes. The long term sustainability of these jobs are questionable since it is linked to programmes which typically have fixed budgets over specified time frames.

¹ The need to create between 1.9 million and 9.9 million new small businesses between 2012 and 2030

² www.operationphakisa.gov.za

3 THE ROLE OF SMMES IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

As mentioned in the introduction, SMMEs can contribute to a green economy. There are already many SMMEs actively participating and contributing community services including waste management services in South Africa as indicated in Table 1. SMMEs also contribute positively and financially towards the economy of South Africa (Gimenez, Sierra and Rodon, 2012; Bottomley and MacPhee, 2019).

Table 1: Key indicators for SMMEs (BER, 2016)

KEY INDICATORS	2015 ³
Number of SMMEs	2 251 821
Number of formal SMMEs	667 433
Number of informal SMMEs	1 497 860
SMME owners as % of total employment	14%
% operating in trade & accommodation	43%
% operating in community services	14%
% operating in construction	13%
% operating in fin. & business services	12%
% contribution to GDP	42%
% black owned formal SMMEs	34%
% operated by income group < R30 000 p.a.	7%

A survey carried out by the Bureau for Economic Research in 2016 for the Small Enterprise Development Agency indicated that SMMEs contributed 42% (Table 1) to the national GDP. Furthermore, the contribution of SMMEs to GDP is reported to have increased between 2011 and 2015 (BER, 2016). SMMEs promote local business development through entrepreneurship, they build resilience at a grass roots level and introduce competitive and innovative value chains (Slavova, Heuer and Agster, 2015).

In contrast, a study conducted in the rural town Alice, in the Eastern Cape Province, found that SMMEs did not contribute to alleviating socio-economic factors such as unemployment, crime, and poverty. The main reasons for this were challenges being faced by SMMEs namely financing, poor managerial skills, inadequate advice and information, and lack of training and education (Oyelana and Fiseha, 2014). These factors need to be in place for an SMME to contribute positively.

While it is well documented that SMMEs could potentially have a positive and benevolent social impact in the communities that they function within, this is not automatically the case (Gimenez, Sierra and Rodon, 2012; Bottomley and MacPhee, 2019). This is even less so amongst SMMEs in the waste and recycling sector, since SMMEs generally perceive corporate social responsibility initiatives to be the mainstay of large corporations with equally large budgets (Ladzani and Seeletse, 2012; Xinwa, 2018). When an SMME invests money into assisting communities, it inevitably promotes itself and also attracts potential customers. Business social responsibility⁴ was found to be very poorly incorporated even within long established SMME businesses, which had moved beyond the survivalist stage (been in existence and thriving, for three years and more) in Gauteng (Ladzani and Seeletse, 2012). This was surprising since the apparently successful and well established small businesses scored very well under a number of management criteria assessed in the study⁵. Other authors have noted that businesses which perform well are well aware of the benefits of leveraging social capital, as was found in a study in Butterworth (Xinwa, 2018).

³ Data from second quarter of the year.

⁴ Also sometimes referred to as small business social responsibility variation or corporate social responsibility

⁵ For instance, leadership, planning and strategy, customer and market focus, people management, resource and information management, business processes, social responsibility, customer satisfaction, people satisfaction, people satisfaction, supplier and partnership performance and business results.

The following section presents a summary of findings of the issues, which need to be considered when setting up an SMME program. The information presented are drawn from interviews with SMMEs and stakeholders (either private or public) in the waste and recycling sector over the period 2018-2019 in KZN and is supplemented with international experiences from literature.

4 WHAT FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN ESTABLISHING AN SMME PROGRAM?

The following factors were cited as imperative by both SMMEs and stakeholders whom support or work with these organisations. A program should typically start with some sort of *agreement* between the SMME and the program manager. It is wise to reduce this agreement to a *document in writing* which outlines *SMART*⁶ achievable *goals* and *objectives* for both parties, so that both parties are aware of their commitments and obligations to one another.



Figure 1 SMART achievable goals and objectives⁷

Following is a discussion of some of the issues which were mentioned by both SMMEs and program managers in both public sector and private sector that supported SMMEs in such programs in KZN.

4.1 Experience

People determine if an organisation succeeds or fails, they are the foundation of the organisation. Empowering people through providing them with opportunities to gain *experience* or *learning* is important for the company to be able to do what it does. Experience can be gained through a number of different mechanisms, for instance through (formal or informal) *education*, *training* and *work experience*. Olawale and Garwe, (2010) caution that *managerial skills* are also important for the survival of the small business, and in a number of cases are part of the reason why new firms fail. This would also be important for an SMME program. When designing a program in which SMMEs will participate it is important to understand if the SMME have the requisite abilities to do the job at hand. If not, or if some gaps in ability are identified then it is the prerogative of the municipality or organisation

⁶ Goals need to be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time bound.

⁷ Source: Madison Merrihew, undated.

implementing the SMME program to decide how those gaps will be bridged. Experience is also cited as a factor, which could result in the failure of an SMME program if not taken seriously.

4.2 Operating locally

A local footprint for SMME in the area the program is intended to be rolled out is also important. This means that either the SMME should have worked in the area, or alternatively the SMME has employees (formal or informal) from the area in which it plans to operate. This means that the SMME will be aware of *local conditions* i.e. markets and sources of materials for instance. It will also have access to *local support organisations* i.e. advocacy groups, community networks etc. The other benefit for the organisation setting up the SMME program is that strides to encourage *local job creation* will be made when SMMEs are chosen. Even if SMMEs are brought in from other areas, it usually makes for a better symbiosis to have some form of local job creation with people from within a community. Evidence that an SMME is operational in a local area is if it is paying for municipal services (electricity, water and property taxes) to a local municipality. These criteria could also be weighted⁸ and used as criteria for inclusion in to the program.

A study conducted in Kenya found that companies which hired local staff, purchased materials locally had greater financial success (Chege and Wang, 2020). These companies are also more resilient to global policy changes such as operation green sword or currency exchange rate fluctuations (Muswema *et al.*, 2018).

4.3 Understand their chosen business model

A knowledge of their chosen business model is important in setting up viable SMMEs. This pertains specifically to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the type of business in question. While this factor is less applicable to well established SMMEs beyond the 'survivalist' stage described by The dti (The dti, 2004), newly constituted SMMEs would do well to understand the implication of their chosen particular business model. The type of business model affects funding, revenue and capital generation options as well. For instance there are case studies of very successful cooperatives from other parts of the world (Medina, 2000, 2005; Wanyama, Develtere and Pollet, 2009) and also successful case studies from South Africa's pre 1994 history (Abrahams, 2009). Understanding their particular business model including limitations and potential for growth is key. There is even evidence of successful family run cooperative entities which are *constituted for the right reasons*⁹ and which grow organically without outside pressures (Godfrey *et al.*, 2015; Muswema *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, no matter what type of SMME model is chosen, the owners need to understand how their business model works and what the limitations of that business model are. Respondents also commented that there was a need for officials to have a basic understanding of the different business models as well. It does not help to default to creating cooperatives. In some instances, it might actually be better for a single owner type of SMME (i.e. a PTY limited) to be allowed to participate in an SMME program. In this case a single person can be held accountable, and decision making is typically more effective.

4.4 SMMEs must grow organically

The issue of the long term survivability and hence the sustainability of SMMEs was raised by respondents. Some SMMEs were reported to not be sustainable without support. This support includes the likes of a vehicle, funding, equipment, a premises to operate from. All of these things are key and should ideally be in place already for an SMME entering in to a support programme. Supporting SMMEs can provide some of these items, however the organisation needs to be aware that there will be a 'teething period' within which the SMME will need to get accustomed to operating with. Also there needs to be a demonstration that the SMMEs have made their own progress towards attaining some of these things. Days of being spoon fed are over given the current pressures on the fiscus with embattled State Owned Enterprises. There is simply not enough money to be wasted. We

⁸ For instance, SMME based in and employing in an area is better than employing people from an area compared to having no previous linkages to an area.

⁹ For instance, less of a top down approach in constituting the SMME.

need to be rewarding productive members of society, rather than propping up SMMEs which do not have a go getter or entrepreneurial spirit.

Organic growth of SMMEs was a concern to authors as far back as 1974 (Mesarovic and Pestel, 1974). The authors identified the need for (a) individual awareness of membership of the world community, (b) responsibility in the use of material resources, (c) a harmonious relationship with nature, (d) a sense of identification with future generations. This concern for organic growth should also be applied to SMMEs as business entities which should also grow in a similar fashion within their environment.

4.5 Financial and operational management

SMMEs need to have some knowledge in *financial* and *operational* management. This is a basic and critical requirement of any small business. Some good recommendations for evaluating an SMMEs proficiency along these lines include a) does the SMME have a valid *tax certificate* from previous year. This is also a good indicator that the SMME has been operating for more than just a single year b) are *audited financial statements* available. These requirements should be evaluated at the beginning of the program, and the program manager and the SMME need to be aware that these are either non-negotiable or flexible requirements. Financial management should also incorporate an element of *tracking efficiencies*, for instance tracking the amount of recyclate recovered, the *frequency of clean-ups*, the *standards of the clean-up* (what the area should look like afterwards), and *mitigating challenges* for instance what to do during a missed collection, how to inform the public if a clean-up is taking place in a public area. Also provisions for *future planning* need to be clearly spelled out in a strategic agreement signed upfront with the SMME. It is unfair to demand these checks and balances once the SMMEs have been operational for some time. The impact of purchasing a bailer, how will the increased costs (i.e. in power, additional skilled manpower) be offset by increased collections, increased expenses, and therefore increased processing. What needs to be in place for these future operations to be successful, these should be discussed and agreed to upfront.

A 2008 study conducted in KZN found that SMMEs had poor financial, management and accounting skills (Rajaram, 2008). These findings were echoed in other studies (Godfrey *et al.*, 2017). If novice SMMEs are engaged in to a program, this means that the officials responsible for implementation will be busy 'baby-sitting' the SMME, making sure that these basic items are in place or are being adhered to. This detracts from achieving agreed upon *milestones* in terms of performance with the small business. There is nothing wrong with the stakeholder providing this support, it should be remembered though as alluded to previously that emerging and survivalist SMMEs will require an intensive period of 'handholding'. Training may be required for the SMME on financial and operational requirements.

4.6 Accountability on promises

Being accountable on promises works both ways between the stakeholder supported and the SMME. This should be clearly spelled out in writing at the beginning of an SMME program, and these promises should be reviewed regularly (Muswema and Oelofse, 2016). If funding is promised to support the expansion of the SMME, in to new areas, for increased tonnages of waste or recyclate to be collected, these should be clearly outlined. SMMEs should be aware of what is expected of them if they are to access better terms on loans, increased areas to service, expansion in to manufacturing or processing of recyclate. A study conducted in the City of Johannesburg on the integration of reclaimers into formal practice investigated the breakdown and mismatch of understandings between the different stakeholders.

4.7 Passion

Respondents reported that some level of passion or interest in the work that was being done was important. This is an intrinsic and internal factor to the *staff* or *individual(s)* managing the SMME, this is an important ingredient that brings all the 'flavours' together and certainly assists to overcome *obstacles* on the journey to success. It also helps if the stakeholder is invested in the project and also demonstrates a level of passion towards the success of the program.

4.8 Constant review

It was stated in the beginning of this section that it is important for an agreement to be drawn up between SMMEs and stakeholders (public and private). With time a number of things change. The SMMEs become more efficient, they sometimes acquire equipment which allows them to be more efficient. Respondents (both SMMEs and stakeholders) remarked that it was important to review these agreements. There may be failures along the way, markets may change or crash, there may be external challenges, but the reasons for these failures need to be acknowledged and reviewed with some regularity. By reviewing the terms of engagement it is possible to understand what needs to be done better in the future, and learn from the experiences of the past.

5 CONCLUSION

SMMEs are key to South Africa's just transition to a green economy. The waste sector provides opportunities for SMME involvement in waste service delivery, but also in growing the recycling industry in South Africa. It is evident that municipalities are key role players in creating an enabling environment for SMMEs participation in the economy. This paper presents some preliminary thoughts on important factors which need to be considered when setting up an SMME program. The intention is to package this information combined with additional work that is still underway, into a guideline for SMME involvement in waste management and recycling services. While the information was obtained from KZN it is possible that these considerations could be generalised to SMME programs in other parts of South Africa. It is re-iterated that any program should be reduced to an agreement in writing between the two stakeholders, with SMART goals and objectives set out in a contract. These should be regularly reviewed and amended as time goes by.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Authors are grateful to the CSIR for research funding towards this project.

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