

STRENGTHENING INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION IN SUPPORT OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA – ATTEMPTS, TOOLS AND REFLECTIONS

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Abstract

At the dawn of the second decade of democracy the South African Government set itself the ambitious task of ensuring shared, sustainable and inclusive economic growth of more than 6% per annum for at least 15 years in order to finally eradicate the vestiges of apartheid and strengthen social integration and territorial cohesion. This, it acknowledges, would require high levels of intergovernmental harmonisation, integration and coordination in planning, budgeting and implementation, something which the three spheres of government have been struggling to achieve ever since their creation in 1996.

This state of affairs has not been due to a lack of trying, with the national sphere of government going to great lengths to (1) put in place an enabling legal and policy framework, (2) prepare numerous guidelines and regulations, and (3) introduce a range of capacity building initiatives in all of the country's nine provinces. Despite all of these endeavours, and a strong political mandate, intergovernmental development planning has remained a distant ideal.

In an attempt to address both the socio-economic objectives of government and the intergovernmental challenges around coordinated planning and investment, Government has identified district/metro areas to be the basic units to drive intergovernmental coordination to maximise the potential of regions

This requires (1) districts/metros to take leadership and play a pivotal role in coordinating and aligning the actions of a wide spectrum of actors to bring about social and economic transformation, and (2) for the whole of government and other role players to build an understanding of the nature and distribution of regional potential with district and metropolitan areas as the pivotal sites for intergovernmental coordination.

During 2007 the Presidency embarked on a project to achieve the above, through contextualising the approach and principles of the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) as a base for structuring intergovernmental dialogue and the development of a shared understanding of the regional space economy. As part of this process an attempt was made to refine and develop methodologies to support this intergovernmental dialogue at district level using the NSDP approach.

The aim of this paper is to (1) introduce and explain the methodologies, tools and techniques applied in the project, (2) provide a critical account of the contribution made by these methodologies to establish the NSDP approach among government stakeholders, and support the role of the district in regional development and intergovernmental planning, and (3) reflect on the learning emanating from this project especially in the fields of multi-governmental, inter-territorial (strategic spatial) and participatory planning.

Keywords

Intergovernmental collaboration, planning methodologies, strategic spatial planning, shared understanding, integrated development planning, regional development

Paper message

This paper argues, on the back of a pilot project in 13 district municipalities:

1. That it is possible to achieve greater intergovernmental collaboration, coordination and alignment in planning, budgeting and implementation than is currently the case.
2. That the post-1994 collaborative, communicative/dialogical planning paradigm/model/project should not be abandoned in the light of past and present shortcomings and disappointments.
3. That innovative tools and methods are useful in achieving the desired intergovernmental actions and outcomes.
4. That positive, progressive actor behaviour and efficient, supportive institutions are crucial to ensure institutional through-put of outputs and developmental impact of processes in which such tools and methods are deployed.
5. That learning, sharing and taking heed of lessons, and the monitoring of 'making good on commitments' are crucial ingredients in any intergovernmental planning endeavour.

Introduction

Over the last two decades intergovernmental integration and coordination has been (1) a lively topic in the international planning arena and (2) on the agenda on many states with multi-governmental forms of planning, budgeting and implementation.

The South African Government, at the dawn of the second decade of democracy, set itself the ambitious task of ensuring shared, sustainable and inclusive economic growth of more than 6% per annum for at least 15 years in order to finally eradicate the vestiges of apartheid and strengthen social integration and territorial cohesion. This, it acknowledges, would require high levels of intergovernmental harmonisation, integration and coordination in planning, budgeting and implementation, something which the three spheres of government have been struggling to achieve ever since their creation in 1996.

In a renewed effort at addressing these challenges, Government has identified district/metro areas to be the basic units to drive intergovernmental coordination to maximise the potential of regions. During 2007, the Presidency embarked on a project to achieve the above, through contextualising the approach and principles of the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) as a base for structuring intergovernmental dialogue and the development of a shared understanding of the regional space economy at district level.

In the rest of this paper we:

- Briefly discuss the background to and roll-out of the pilot;
- Discuss and critically evaluate some of the innovative tools and methods, utilising place as a shared focus; and
- Reflect on the learning emanating from this project especially in the fields of multi-governmental, inter-territorial (strategic spatial) and participatory planning.

Intergovernmental collaboration and development impact: Calls, visions and pursuits

The South African government, since the dawn of the democratic transition in 1994, pursued focused, collective and collaborative State action in the eradication of the social and economical ills inherited from apartheid¹.

Ensuring synergy and coordination in the deployment of State resources proved hard to achieve for a variety of reasons, most of which were related to a lack of communication and alignment in and amongst the three spheres of government. Wasteful and inefficient utilisation of government resources continued, entrenching the unequal apartheid space economy and making the achievement of government's key objectives of rapid, sustainable and shared growth, and the reduction of unemployment and poverty ever more difficult.

This undesirable state of affairs led to a number of high-level government initiatives aimed at ensuring intergovernmental collaboration and alignment, including legal and policy interventions, intergovernmental task teams and a range of executive decisions/statements.

Of key importance in the case of the latter was the decision by the President's Coordinating Council (PCC) that the district/metropolitan Integrated Development Plan (IDP) had to become the shared expression of the development objectives and intentions of the three spheres of government, with district-metro areas thus becoming 'impact zones' in which the development actions of government could be focused, harmonised and aligned.

Growing support for this approach came from a burgeoning body of local and international literature, emphasising the value of coordinated, synergised and aligned government investment in achieving social, economic, environmental and spatial objectives on a myriad of levels, ranging from that of the European Union to the local (see Faludi, 2002, 2003a and 2003b; de Rooij, 2002; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002; Albrechts *et al.*, 2003; Gualini, 2003 and Horgan, 2002 and 2004). Of late a number of these papers (notably those by Faludi and Albechts *et al.*) have also stressed the use and limits of spatial planning in drawing together the myriad of investment and spending decisions of an ever-growing number of role-players in space.

¹ See the notion of 'cooperative governance' in the 1996-Constitution, and the *White Paper on Local Government in 1998*, which emphasised the need for intergovernmental collaboration in utilising limited state resources in growing the local economy, creating jobs and reducing poverty.

At the same time another stream of work emerged, stressing the value of focusing development of 'functional economic regions' in the pursuit of national economic growth. A key feature of this approach was that of 'learning regions' in which dense networks of institutions in regions both acted as (1) the instigators and (2) the glue of regional development. This, in turn, strongly suggested a focus on development practices that support and enhance such regional institutions and their links to the economic activities in regions.

In an attempt to break the cycle of lack of coordination, alignment and synergy, Cabinet adopted the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) in January 2003 and the updated version in 2006. Strongly informed by the above-mentioned international literature, the NSDP provided a spatial logic and set of normative principles to inform and guide all decisions on infrastructure investment and development spending by all three spheres of government in 'regions'. Following on from the PCC-decision this 'regional focus' translated locally into 'a shared focus by all three spheres of government in their planning and budgeting actions' on the 46 district and 6 metropolitan municipal areas.

In support of these efforts, Cabinet approved the Harmonisation and Alignment Framework in January 2005. This framework called for strategic, structured, high-level dialogue in and between spheres of government about investment in regional space, with the aim of reaching a shared understanding of, and a joint agreement on, (1) the key economic challenges, development potentials, bottlenecks and needs in provinces and district and metropolitan municipal areas, and (2) the required investment in type, time, space and duration to address the developmental needs and harness the district/metropolitan potentials. In this way, it was believed, a regional platform would be created on which actors in the three spheres of government could conduct their strategic and sector planning and prepare their budgets.

In order to ensure that this model transpired in practice, government embarked on a pilot project (referred to as the NSDP District Application Project) in which a set of a practical instruments/methods were developed to enable such a shared understanding, strengthen the IDP development process and make district and metropolitan IDPs collective expressions of the development plans of all three spheres of government.

The pilot project: Promise and quest

The NSDP District Application Project² was rolled out in 13 district areas³ as a first phase of a national roll-out. The first phase was viewed as an opportunity (1) to establish a platform for future collaborative strategic planning in district/metro areas as a collaborative learning experience, and (2) to inform key strategic planning processes and instruments in government.

The project in the participating districts basically entailed (1) building capacity on the contextualisation of the NSDP principles at district and metropolitan level, (2) facilitating high-level intergovernmental dialogue,

² This project was initiated by The Presidency and to a large extent co-funded and driven by the GTZ, Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), Department of Provincial and Local Government.

³ The participating district municipalities in eight of the nine provinces in the country (all excluding Gauteng), were: Amatole and Cacadu (Eastern Cape); Thabo Mofutsanyane (Free State); Ilembe, Ugu, and Umkhanyakude (KwaZulu-Natal); Vhembe, Waterberg (Limpopo); Nkangala (Mpumalanga); Pixley ka Seme (Northern Cape); Bophirima and Central (North West) and Cape Winelands (Western Cape). Thswane Metro (Gauteng) were initially included as part of the project but withdrew as a result of internal institutional issues.

utilising the NSDP approach to strategically engage the key development issues, themes and topics in a district/metro, and (3) assisting key role players in the area to reach a common understanding on aspects such as the needs, development potential, long-term objectives, strategies and trade-offs required to enable targeted infrastructure investment and development spending in the district. This, it was envisaged, would then provide the platform for state investment and spending to take place in a focused, coordinated and synergistic way. And, while not run 'in opposition to' existing municipal, provincial and sector planning and implementation processes, the project was also not executed as 'a part of such processes'. It could be said that it was run 'in support of' (read also 'in parallel to') existing process, which, of course, had both pros and cons.

In most of the districts, the roll-out entailed the following six components

One: The project started with the mobilisation of project teams (consisting of a project driver in the district municipality (usually the IDP Manager), a representative from the Office of the Premier, coordinating facilitator and support consultants), raising awareness and obtaining high-level buy in from participating district municipalities, provinces as well as other key role players.

Two: An 'overview profile' was compiled for every district, which included (1) a basic contextual analysis of the district's space economy; (2) an overview of existing development-related reports and strategic plans; (3) interviews with key role players on their perceptions of the economic development potential of the area, key needs, hurdles and threats and strength of intergovernmental cooperation amongst key role players in the area.

The Strategic Engagement and Analysis Matrix (SEAM) (see Box 1) was developed and used as key instrument to capture information about the development of the area, enabling teams and role players to systematically engage with, for example, complex realities, multiple view points, different 'sector readings', proposed programmes – as well as the interrelatedness of these. The SEAM was regarded as extremely successful and useful as a tool in preparing for intergovernmental planning processes and for recording the outcomes of such processes.

Box 1: Strategic Engagement and Analysis Matrix

The SEAM was designed in the form of a matrix to surface, discuss, debate, map out and identify inter-relationships between the developmental needs, challenges, trends, potentials within the area. As a tool this assisted in simplifying the complexity and facilitating a high-level two-to-three day strategic work-session, building a shared 'explanatory model' and understanding of the requirements of a district/metro to ensure its sustainable development. It was structured with main themes/development issues on the one axis and probing questions on the other. The probing questions were designed to (1) elicit and structure inter-governmental, multi-sectoral and lateral engagement on the key development themes and issues in a district/metro area; (2) ensure robust interrogation of ideas, constructs and proposals to address development issues; (3) surface innovative ways of addressing challenges; and (4) ensure a careful analysis of the costs, benefits and risks associated with existing and proposed development and service provision modes, options and proposals. These questions were organised into four themes, namely (1) description of need/potential/project; (2) current response(s); (3) role-players and relations; and (4) evaluation: implications, imperative and proposed responses. It enabled cross-reference, inter-sector analysis, as well as identification of interrelations and interdependencies.

Utilising the SEAM relied on well-informed, facilitated, structured and active participation by key state actors from all three spheres of government and non-state role players in the development of the district/metro. This required commitment from all involved, sound local knowledge and unbiased, solid outsider interpretation of technical social, economical, institutional, environmental and spatial data of the area as well as a strong innovative spirit. This, in turn, required that the outside experts and the facilitator were well-versed in the developmental profile of the district/metro and the broader regional context. In addition to this, it relied on a dedicated group of champions in the district/metro to bring together and infuse the different role players, and sustain the momentum.

The project also marked a major breakthrough in introducing a novel tool to support contextual space-economy and social-ecological analysis and strategic regional 'sense making'. This tool was largely developed in response to a pressing need identified in various studies that sought to (better) understand and improve on current intergovernmental planning practice – i.e. that of a lack of a shared data-set/platform (see CSIR, 2005; Oranje and van Huyssteen, 2004 and 2007; Harrison, 2002 and Oranje, 2002 and 2003). Aptly called the 'Geospatial Analysis Platform Version2 (GAP2)'⁴, this tool, which was originally developed for the 2006-NSDP, was updated, refined (its grain sharpened) and improved (in terms of data-layers, textures and intensity) to enable such strategic analysis.

Three: In most districts an information session on the principles and approach of the NSDP and the scope and intentions with the pilot was held as part of the preparatory work. These sessions built capacity of key role players on the NSDP and its value (often regarded as contentious) in highlighting required trade-offs and the implications of development decisions. It also raised awareness on and secured buy-in for the aims, objectives and proposed roll-out of the project.

Focused preparatory engagement sessions between the outside and inside project teams were held in each district. Instead of merely having intergovernmental strategic sessions in which delegates showed each other their PowerPoint presentations, these sessions effectively enabled external and internal teams to distil and engage on the essence of development questions and key blockages within the extremely limited time and resources available. These sessions also (in a structured way) 'put the NSDP principles to practice' in strategic analysis, plan evaluation and plan making for the area. These sessions, and the close intergovernmental collaboration, unintentionally provided opportunities for strategic planners and development champions in municipalities and provinces to (1) strengthen their strategic planning capacity (as individuals and teams), (2) question and internalise the NSDP approach, (3) reflect on development processes, practices and instruments (including plans and budgets), and (4) build leadership-confidence. During these engagements a district-specific roll-out strategy was also crafted/agreed upon.

Four: Probably the most 'visible' component and crux of intergovernmental engagement of the project was the facilitated work-session which provided an arena for key role players from the district municipality,

4 The SA Geospatial Analysis Platform (GAP) is the result of an evolving, collaborative initiative. The principle active participants (up to mid-2007) include the CSIR, The Presidency, Policy Coordination and Advice Services and the dti (the Department of Trade and Industry). GAP can be described as a common, meso-scale geospatial platform for the assembly, analysis and sharing of strategic geospatial information. That is information about a) what is where; b) how much is there; c) where are the main concentrations/ hot spots to be targeted; and d) what can be reached from where. GAP is strongly based on the CSIR's mesoframe methodology, which takes its name from the irregular, meso-scale geoframe that was developed as the primary component of what has become the Geospatial Analysis Platform.

various local municipalities, and provincial and national sector departments to debate and reach a common understanding on aspects such as the needs, development potential and long-term development objectives of the district. Due to resource and time restrictions this was, in most cases, a once-off discussion that ran over two days (arguably a mere drop in the ocean of the support actually required to strengthen municipal and intergovernmental planning). The SEAM was used to structure the work session, elicit debate and different view points around tradeoffs and priorities and capture the inputs from participants as 'different but equal sources/kinds of knowledge'. The regional level spatial analysis supported by GAP2, as well as ancillary techniques such as sketch/concept mapping, also proved to be useful tools in contextualising the development debate in a broader context and surfacing different and shared perceptions, readings and interpretations of development challenges and opportunities in the district area during deliberations.

Five: Based on the outcomes of the respective strategic work-sessions, a shared understanding on the development of the district area was formulated and priority intergovernmental actions and/or key leverage areas, crucial to the development trajectory of the district, were identified. In practice the two-day session provided some space for gaining a deeper understanding of the NSDP and the development dynamics in the district. The shared understanding (even though limited by the project's implementation outside existing institutional processes and limited engagement about the future) was heralded by many role players, not only as key to the project outcomes, but also as a tool that could assist in turning intergovernmental coordination from mere discussion into action. The reports were recorded in a concise format to assist in simplifying and concretely capturing the essence around the shared understanding of place, as well as of developmental priorities and required action. In some districts this document now acts as a record to inform and provide a point of departure for subsequent sector plans, IDP reviews, council discussions and district and provincial intergovernmental engagements.

Six: The intention with the project was obviously to integrate the outcomes into formal district, provincial and national planning processes. It was foreseen that district and provincial representatives would ensure that successes and learning, regarding intergovernmental collaboration, would infiltrate district and provincial specific processes, and that progress made in terms of development priorities and actions were translated into the relevant strategic and operational plans and budgets. In a number of districts the outcomes of this process were institutionalised and taken up in official forums, development planning processes and instruments. However, the limited institutional and individual capacities, as well as the high turnover levels in government positions, and counter-productive power relations, resulted in many districts actually not embedding or building onto the benefits from the processes and project, or doing so in *ad hoc* and very limited ways. At a national level, various policy issues and aspects which have a bearing on development, intergovernmental cooperation and capacity requirements were extracted in discussions with the Presidency for further attention.

The project came to an end in mid-2007 with many of the participating districts and provinces making a plea for additional support for follow-ups to ensure the uptake of progress into institutional processes and planning and budgeting actions. The next round of the project roll-out got underway late in 2007 with a less central and far more provincial and contextually-specific approach, and with the intention of reaching all remaining districts by the end of 2008.

Project reflection: Lessons, gains and hope

Within the limited scope of this paper it is not possible to provide an overview of the magnitude of findings and learning emanating from the project⁵, suffice to raise a few of the key lessons which, as viewed by the authors of the paper (who, it should be stated, were all closely involved in the design, roll-out and recording of learning of the project), clearly illustrate that ensuring greater intergovernmental collaboration, coordination, and alignment in planning, budgeting and implementation is a 'project'/mission still worthwhile pursuing.

While holding a generally positive view of what was achieved, it is definitely not argued that the many (maybe over-ambitious) project aims were met, or that the districts that participated in the project are suddenly on a different development path. At the same time, the project re-emphasised a number of pitfalls/challenges in mobilising intergovernmental action towards sustainable development, but at least this time round within a much clearer perspective as to how they can be addressed. Key pitfalls/challenges amongst these are: (1) the ease with which processes can fall back into exercises aimed at ensuring compliance, rather than moving towards new perspectives and understandings; (2) the danger of raising expectations that are not lived up to, with cynicism often following in close pursuit; (3) the persistent absence of consideration for 'the longer term'; (4) the lack of capacity in most government structures to undertake intergovernmental planning; (5) the need for strategic provincial and national guidance; and (6) the dangers of 'speaking truth to power' in situations where 'power is the (only) truth'.

While it would be possible to delve into each of these and dabble on ground already covered in other reports and papers, we saw it of more value to instead focus on a number of key lessons that were learnt, and that we believed to be worth sharing.

H: Place and new readings of space as 'meeting ground' for sectors, spheres and disciplines

One of the key contributions to strengthening intergovernmental relations was the project's focus on a distinct geographic unit, i.e. the district as organising unit/area of shared impact for all three spheres of government. This provided a specific context to the deliberations and debates, and moved the concept of intergovernmental relations from an often abstract/conceptual discussion of processes and protocols (e.g. alignment of timing in planning and budgeting) to the (real) development dynamics of a specific place. Participants explored and interrogated the different substantive aspects of development, and the role of each participating organisation in a joint attack on developmental challenges. Both the regional spatial analysis and the SEAM explored the concepts of 'potential' and 'need' as defined in the NSDP in the districts. This provided a 'new, shared and consistent reading' of the spatial manifestation of development and its various dimensions in the district. This also provided participants with tangible entry points into the debate and alternative means to engage contextual realities within, as well as between, functional and administrative regions.

⁵ During the course of the project and after project completion, learning that emanated from the project was captured using both written questionnaires complete by participants in the project and interviews with key project stakeholders. This was supplemented by ongoing observations by technical experts included in the project team. The findings/lessons discussed below reflect the result of these surveys and observations, unless otherwise indicated.

H: Working from the same slate and hearing (multiple) voices and narratives to engage complexity

The regional social, economic and environmental (even though limited) data-platform provided by both GAP2 and the systems approach used in the SEAM assisted in capturing different dimensions and viewpoints of, and relationships between, issues and challenges. This provided a common platform for both strategic and comparative analysis of the district area and its relation to its broader context to build on during strategic work sessions. The spatially referenced socio-economic and environmental data, in a format that was contextualised and could be shared, also provided the basis for discussions and a platform for regional and relational evaluations. In essence, it provided the possibility to work from the same platform instead of merely debating the differences between datasets and fixating on obstacles in settling for a particular set. Through the debates and interrogations, 'data' was used to not to badger others or frustrate processes, but to gain insights and share existing and jointly build new knowledge regarding the forces and factors that shape development in the district area.

The way in which the dialogues and processes were structured also provided a powerful way to bring together different angles, sources and types of knowledge into an 'accepted' account of reality – i.e. quantitative and technical information was, for example, complemented by knowledge of development history and 'real stories' of how people have dealt and are coping, and what would be needed to assist them. In contrast to other processes, different realities and sectors were not competing for a slice of the cake, but rather assisting each other in building onto, and giving substance to 'the story of development' in the area.

Even the way in which the SEAM-matrix was populated during the deliberations between the role players in the structured dialogue – not all of it agreed to by all, but regarded as of equal importance, as it was held by some of those present to be valid/true – assisted in developing a shared picture (or narrative) not only of the development profile, but also of the different perspectives on this profile for the region. In many ways this also proved to be an extremely useful tool in engaging complexity and through deliberations, highlighting multiple and conflicting worldviews, disciplinary perspectives and development approaches.

Φ: Looking beyond the borders and (sometimes) valuing greener pastures

The spatial analysis at a regional scale supported by GAP2, using comparable spatial units of measurement, provided a capability to work across scales and contributed to the content of the strategic dialogue. Not only did it put the spatial manifestation of economic activity and poverty in the district itself into an intra-district context, but it also provided the capability to consider the development dynamics in a specific area in the context of the broader region. This contributed to challenging current perceptions and effecting changes in perceptions (e.g. the relative importance of areas of economic activity within a district or the relative size of the district economy in the broader provincial and national context).

The use of sketch mapping to capture the existing perceptions of participants at the outset of some of the work sessions proved to be a tangible way to start discussion about the different understandings of the area or different angles at understanding the area. It also gave participants insight into each others 'vantage points', and proved to be a valuable reference point in the strategic dialogue that was to follow. This highlighted the usefulness of tools such as sketch mapping/concept mapping in strategic planning at a regional scale.

Я: On the other side of discomfort – difficult questions and serious debate

The intergovernmental work sessions were designed, and facilitators selected, to make a substantial contribution not only by (1) leading (and in some ways probably enthusing/enticing) participants to interrogate and unpack development issues, but also by (2) seeing, highlighting and describing the relationship(s) between issues. The SEAM provided the main structuring tool for facilitating the strategic dialogue in many of the districts. In highlighting this inter-relatedness, it provided a concrete demonstration of the multitude of dimensions, scales, and variety of interest groups in the development of a district. Both the SEAM and regional space-economy analysis enabled facilitators to give issues that are often discussed in very abstract terms in intergovernmental engagements a strong 'reality-angle'. In this endeavour they were also able to show the impact of developmental challenges on the people that have to devise coping strategies in response to these challenges and stay alive despite them. In so doing it provided participants from all spheres of government with a perspective as to how their specific sector or function makes, or could make a contribution to the quality of the lives of people living in the places they are responsible for.

One of the strong points of the strategic dialogues was that the 'hard questions' were not avoided. Being confronted with stark realities, such as the number of jobs to be created in a municipality per annum, or the cost of providing and maintaining basic services to a small, spatially-isolated community, transformed political debates about principles, ideals and theoretical concepts into a real engagement with hard and often painful choices, and an exploration of innovative options/alternatives. In this way it contributed to a greater sense of realism, a 'real' engagement with sustainability and a greater appreciation of the value of the stated focus of the NSDP on people, not places, when confronted with hard choices regarding investment in space and time. The shared understanding achieved from such probing, hard-hitting discussions was in turn representative not only of 'what the area looks like' spatially, almost in a two-dimensional way, but also 'how the area works/functions and how this manifests in, and impacts upon, space and vice versa'.

Ж: Moving from 'talk is cheap' to 'words and dialogue for action'

This shared understanding of 'how the area works', demonstrated potential to address one of the most infamous sources of frustration in intergovernmental planning and implementation – i.e. the challenge of walking the talk (as agreed to). Recording discussion in real time, either in the SEAM-matrix, or as 'spatially referenced discussions', in a structured and 'relational' way, practically assisted participants in keeping a constant check on what was being said and on the understandings reached. These recordings could be referred to in later stages of the discussion and served as inputs after the completion of the project conclusion in, for instance, an IDP reviews or sector analysis.

The project, furthermore, illustrated that once a common platform of understanding was reached regarding the key drivers that shape development in an area, the actions to be undertaken by all can be clearly identified and described. Reaching agreement among government stakeholders on (1) pursuing certain actions as priorities and (2) the role of each stakeholder in such actions based on a common understanding of the drivers of development, is potentially a more effective and powerful way of prioritising than, for instance, providing a long list of projects for consideration and alignment. Joint prioritisation based on a common platform/shared understanding also seemed to be pursued with far more vigour and commitment from all parties than had been previously experienced when this was left to each role player's

own devices. It also assisted significantly to relationship building among key government stakeholders, who, in many cases, continued collaboration in pursuit of common priorities after completion of the pilot project.

Finally, the project also illustrated the importance of capturing the outcomes of deliberations to ensure action after talking. The 'Shared Understanding' document (as it was called) – was put together in a set format that in itself made sure that all bases were covered, and that proposals were focused on the agreed-upon objectives. This concise, clear record was also viewed as extremely useful by project participants in guiding issue-specific intergovernmental cooperation and guidance to strategic planning in the district.

á: And in the end it is (still) all about people ...

Intergovernmental collaboration, engagement, strategic planning, leadership, facilitation, negotiation ... These are all words of which the actions they refer to and speak of, require agents, institutions, capacity and action. The project, probably more than anything else, (as of course many others before) bears testimony to the difference made by individuals, the gap(s) passion fills, the crucial role of leadership and champions, the importance of buy-in from politicians and senior managers, the brightness of the light of even a shimmering hope in a dark place and the importance of 'everyday human characteristics' like humour, compassion and the ability to work in a team. In the same vein it not only demonstrated the importance of recognising different worldviews and belief systems, but also the power that lies in bringing together different perspectives on a daunting challenge in such a way that it utilises the strengths of all. The project, however, also illustrated the importance of recognising another powerful human characteristic – power, and the often highly destructive impacts of its wolf-like pursuits.

Conclusion

The *NSDP Application Project* demonstrated that there are vaults of positive spin-offs to be gained from a planned, focused and 'substance-based' pursuit of intergovernmental coordination and alignment in planning, budgeting and implementation. Should the many lessons that were learnt in the pilot and (briefly) reported on in this paper be deployed in novel ways, there is every chance that these spin-offs will be realised, and the developmental impact of strategic, spatial and financial planning processes vastly improved.

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