ASSET-BASED AND
CITIZEN-LED DEVELOPMENT

A dialogue session jointly hosted by
CS Mott Foundation, Ikhala Trust and
Coady International Institute (St. Francis Xavier University)

**District Six Museum
Cape Town, South Africa
18 – 19 April 2011**

ACRONYMS

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CS Mott Foundation	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
EC	Eastern Cape
GIBS	Gordon Institute of Business
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SA	South Africa
SCAT	Social Change Assistance Trust
TSDP	Technical Support and Dialogue Platform

"Every living person has some gifts or capacity of value to others. A strong community is a place that recognises these..."
(McKnight and Kretzmann, 1993)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Technical Support and Dialogue Platform (TSDP) of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation was approached by Ikhala Trust, in partnership with Coady International Institute (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada), to fund an Action Research Project on asset based development and its '*evolution, integration and adaption*' within South African NGOs. Seeing the benefit of a broader discussion around such critical themes, the TSDP proposed that they host a joint dialogue session with Ikhala Trust and Coady Institute to create a broader platform for grantees to engage with asset based development and at the same time give input with regards to the proposed action research.
The dialogue took place on the 18 and 19 April 2011 at the District Six Museum in Cape Town and was attended by 30 practitioners from 17 organizations. The session was facilitated and documented by the TSDP. The Ikhala Trust, Coady Institute and GIBS helped to shape the agenda and gave strategic input throughout.

Gord Cunningham from the Coady Institute highlighted the main features of asset-based development and how Coady Institute first became involved. This helped to contextualize the dialogue. He emphasized the importance of assets, leadership, partnerships and agency. He also outlined some of the ways in which asset based as well as community-led development can be stimulated by outside agencies and some of the tensions and dilemmas created given the dominant 'needs based' and 'supply driven' culture. The initial discussion surfaced some critical questions. These continued to be raised in different forms throughout the dialogue process:

- *How does an asset-based orientation change the way we work with communities (and vice versa)?*
- *Is it possible for an organization to stimulate community driven development from outside, to re-ignite leadership?*
- *How do we shift poverty consciousness/ apathy/ entitlement attitudes within communities but also in our organisations? How do we internalize and re-orientate ourselves?*

Following intensive small group discussions, the group mooted key themes and questions for further engagement. Recommendations were also made with regards to the proposed action research. The workshop agreed that a core team will co-ordinate activities to support a 'hub' of practitioners and organizations seeking to engage more deeply with asset based development practices. The core team will primarily be an advisory body (to give strategic input in terms of research, documentation and emerging activities). Coady and GIBS will continue to explore possibilities of jointly offering accredited training in South Africa for asset-based development. Ikhala Trust will continue to lead the action research component in partnership with the Coady Institute. The TSDP will consider how it can continue to support dialogue, research and learning in support of citizen led development. The TSDP was tasked to play a coordinating and linking role in this initial stage and to act as a clearinghouse for knowledge management. This includes 'holding' stories; audiovisual material and research outcomes. Generally, the dialogue session was well received. The workshop was a decisive and progressive step and has provided a concrete plan for moving forward.

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Monique van Willingh of RHYTHM and Byron Abrahams providing entertainment at the workshop.

BACKGROUND

The TSDP of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation was approached by Ikhala Trust in partnership with Coady International Institute (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada) to fund an Action Research Project on asset based development and its '*evolution, integration and adaption*' within South African NGOs. The TSDP recently observed a surge of interest among grantees in asset-based approaches. Having the benefit of a bird's eye view, the TSDP also witnessed many NGO partners struggling to define their purpose and added value in today's context. This has provoked a crisis of relevance for many NGOs as they engage the ongoing struggle for financial resources.

Development practitioners are also grappling with their own development on a personal level. Although many are committed to principles of community-led development, it is difficult to freely express these in organizational environments and a society at large that is deeply conditioned in 'needs' or 'problem' based thinking. The context is supply driven and communities are generally positioned as recipients (rather than producers) of services. NGOs tend to be the service providers and ironically the main beneficiaries in development enterprises. It can be difficult for individuals with an asset-based orientation to thrive in an environment that is contradictory.

Seeing the benefit of a broader discussion around such critical themes, the TSDP proposed that they host a joint dialogue session with Ikhala Trust and Coady Institute to create a broader platform for grantees to engage with asset-based development and at the same time give input with regards to the proposed action research.

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INTENTIONS

The main intention behind the dialogue session was to create a critical learning space for practitioners:

¤ to share their interest and experiences in asset-based development
¤ to explore how the approach is applied within organizations and field practices
¤ to explore possibilities of formalizing learning spaces (with support from Coady Institute, GIBS and NMMU)
¤ to discuss the proposed action research and explore possibilities for collaboration
¤ to assess learning needs and develop a local response strategy including a work plan moving forward

ASSET BASED AND CITIZEN LED DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

Gord Cunningham, Coady Institute

The Coady International Institute has been promoting community self-reliance since it opened its doors 50 years ago. Established by St. Francis Xavier University in 1959, the Institute is world-renowned as a center of excellence in community-based development and leadership education. It was named in honor of Rev. Dr. Moses Coady, a prominent founder of the Antigonish Movement – a movement for economic and social justice that arose in Nova Scotia during the 1920s.

Gord Cunningham from Coady Institute shared his personal journey in asset-based development. He came to Coady with a background in micro finance and was struck by its deep-rooted progressive tradition. Historically, residents proactively formed associations and saving schemes which sparked the Antigonish Movement where residents formed co-operatives and drove their own development ('not waiting for government to do for them'). Coady staff noticed there was something different about the 'DNA' of such communities and began to look for success stories locally and abroad. Their work in asset-based development made a dramatic personal impact on Coady staff who noticed that most of their students were practitioners from NGOs and governments who seemed to be caught in an institutional trap of providing support and technical assistance to communities (rather than supporting organic development already taking place). This brought forward a pivotal question: *Who is really driving development processes?*

After consulting their students it was clear to Coady staff that many organizations are donor-driven and unclear of their intentions in development work. Most intuitively agreed that development is endogenous and comes from 'inside out'. But few seemed confident in framing authentic roles and facilitating genuinely appreciative practices in the field. Discussions with students encouraged Coady to look for case studies around the world of communities driving change. This research has underpinned much of Coady's research and teaching work. The institute currently has a curriculum in asset-based and citizen-led development and a well-established network of international partners.

Coady has been linked to South Africa since the liberation struggle and more recently by actively supporting a growing hub of organizations and practitioners seeking to revive an asset-based orientation within communities. Coady staff have facilitated a number

of seminars and workshops in Eastern Cape, Gauteng and the Western Cape with a range of local partners, and mainly with the Ikhala Trust that has been a partner since 2007. Coady Institute has also conducted research on local case studies.

Tertiary institutions like the NMMU and GIBs have also positively engaged Coady Institute and have expressed interest in further collaboration towards developing a localized curriculum. Nine development practitioners from different South African NGOs were also sponsored by CIDA in 2009 to complete a Coady short course in asset-based community development in Canada.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSETS
"What we realized when we looked at the characteristics of these stories, was that there were a number of common threads that ran through them., One was that the people started small, they started with what they had and then gradually grew to become more ambitious over time…. everyone has gifts and talents."

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP
"Leadership is extremely important. A core role was someone who is able to motivate others to act, motivate others to give of their talents…

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS
"Interestingly enough, outside agencies when they played a role behaved differently. Most NGOs we talked to find themselves as gatekeepers: (they say) those are 'our communities', 'our beneficiaries', 'our target groupings', 'our success stories'. But these organizations didn't think that way. They actually opened up relationships and tried to connect communities to other organizations so that they would not be dependent. In time communities had a multitude of relationships…multi-stakeholder partnerships"

THE IMPORTANCE OF AGENCY
"We realized the importance of this notion of agency - people having capacity to act, to really do things for themselves. To start small and gradually reach their target and to be able to open up relationships to many organizations. …

FACILITATING DEVELOPMENT FROM INSIDE OUT
"Then we looked at: If we know that this is important (and this sounds oxymoronic), is it possible for an organization to stimulate community driven development from the outside? …If it happens spontaneously that's great, but is it possible to actually stimulate, engage and re-ignite leadership; re-ignite community development where it is not happening? And that is the question we posed ourselves…

(Gord Cunningham, Coady International Institute)

SURFACING LESSONS

Coady staff reflected on some of the lessons they have learnt. Practitioners also engaged with the presentation and gave input:

- Ordinary people in successful communities start small with what they have - everyone has gifts and talents (assets).
- Assets are more important than income because people can incrementally grow their asset base and become fully independent.
- Having and growing one's assets can also spark other positive changes like leadership, confidence, self-esteem, opportunities and exposure.
- Motivational and visionary leadership plays a central role in fostering a spirit of civic responsibility
- Agency is key – the capacity of a community to act, to grow their asset base and broaden local networks. This has ripple effects as communities naturally start to attract investment and resources from the outside.
- Successful communities have multi-stakeholder partnerships (rather than dependency on one or few agencies).
- Development facilitators engage differently when they support what communities are already doing for self. They do not see communities as 'their projects or programmes', but rather engage as partners and investors. They allow a measure of adaptability and flexibility in redefining their roles and genuinely supporting developments already taking place.
- Using appreciative inquiry, storytelling (and other adapted PRA methods) practitioners often assisted communities to see a fuller picture and to appreciate the gifts and assets readily available. An important aspect of facilitation was brokering relationships and linking communities with networks and opportunities.
- Facilitators also came together to learn, rather than act as 'experts' with the answers. By connecting with a proactive group, they got to know more about the community and what people have achieved.
- Asset-based approaches are not new – especially in South Africa where there is a long tradition of community-led development. It is important for local practitioners to acknowledge, appreciate and document indigenous knowledge and add their voice to the international development arena.
- By reviving and defining a local spirit and culture of community-led development, African practitioners can make an important contribution in shifting consciousness on a broader scale.
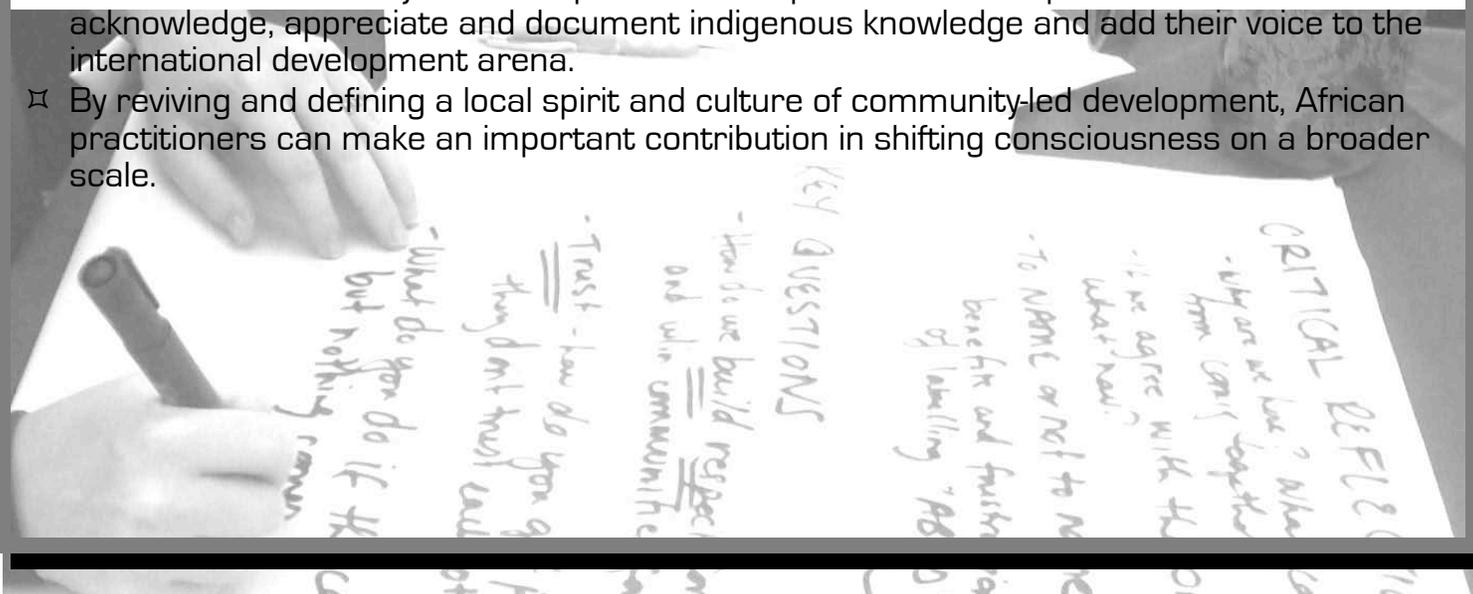
The initial discussion surfaced some critical questions. These continued to be raised in different forms throughout the dialogue process:

- ¤ *How does an asset-based orientation change the way we work with communities (and vice versa)?*
- ¤ *Is it possible for an organization to stimulate community driven development from outside, to re-ignite leadership?*
- ¤ *How do we shift poverty consciousness/ apathy/ entitlement attitudes within communities but also in our organisations? How do we internalize and re-orientate ourselves?*

The workshop was divided into small groups for more intensive discussion. Practitioners were asked to share their reactions to the inputs from Coady International and Ikhala Trust and highlight any critical questions for further research, Groups were also asked to consider whether a case could (or should) be made for an asset based (re) orientation in development.

CRITICAL THEMES

Some critical themes arising out of the discussion are captured below:

Who is involved in whose process?

"We've created an opportunity for an organization to say: "Yeah - we've been looking at needs too much. Now we need to look at assets." But what they're not doing is thinking about community driven development, about citizens leading, about local ownership. It is still an extractive process - but now focusing on assets rather than needs. It is pouring old wine into new bottles ...(Coady Institute)

"If an approach does not allow a community to keep on doing what they have been doing but in a more effective way it should be chucked out...(West Coast Community Foundation)

Service Delivery vs Citizenship - Rights vs Responsibilities

"it is so hard to get away from 'service delivery speak', of how do we get "them' to participate in 'our' programmes?'. For me asset based development is a leveler. It is about rebuilding citizenship, people looking after each other with the different talents they have and growing and mobilizing their assets ..." (Consultant)

"Responsibilities also kicked in, in 1994. It is time for a new social contract to deal with issues of entitlement. What should citizens be doing? What is the right balance? What should we expect from government and what from ourselves?" (Coady Institute)

The Heliotropic Principle

"It is like the Heliotropic Principle in science: when plants bend toward the light, it works the same in community development. When people start making things happen, they create a positive energy and that positive energy draws in other people. People are attracted to them and then they start getting involved…" (Coady Institue)

Tread Lightly

 "If an organization is going to change the way they behave and try to stimulate community driven development then we obviously cannot come in with projects and programmes the same way that we used to…How does (asset-based development) change the way we engage? We use tools of appreciative inquiry, appreciative interviewing where we come into a community, not as expert, not as someone bringing something, but as someone who wants to learn… We look for ways to enter a community - sometimes it's a group of people, a group of women or a residents association. There is always a group who have done something for themselves and are interested in doing more…" (Coady Institute)

Holding up a mirror

"We need to look at ourselves as NGOs…when we say to communities: "work together", what does that mean? Are you able to do the same?" (CS Mott Foundation)

 "Why do we hold onto this role, this power? We hear some organizations saying: "even if you just give us a phone call, talk to us, that is enough." This has come up so many times this 'value added thing' that we bring, the connection, the relationship…As an organization we are ready to take a leap with something different…" (SCAT)

"It is a question of how do we shift our own minds as well. As development practitioners, we also know how to manipulate the system, and focus on the needs. It is something that is so ingrained that even when we want to change it is going to be a challenge. As much as we are saying sometimes that government officials are needs based and (they) need to change their mindsets. I think we need to change our mindsets - what does a different way of working look like for us as practitioners?" (EC NGO Coalition)

Why are we struggling?

"I am struggling to understand why are we grappling? Why are we in this space - what is development practice about? My understanding is that development is about people...We don't celebrate the small successes - what are these 'big' things that we are looking for?" (Ikhala Trust)

Connecting with the Human Story

"I am always stimulated to hear stories from organizations because we as organizations are trying to change, move, deepen our thinking, deepen our practice ... I find it a remarkable human quality – a bubble in us that comes up in us, an inquiring, a seeking notion. What do we need to do to own our own story, for it to be authentic, bold, and inspirational)? (DOCKDA)

A (re) orientation – shifting culture and positioning

"This is how we used to do it. Our roots are in that garden, we come from there..." (Community Development Foundation of the Western Cape)

"Communities are saying: 'we love your work, our capacity is being built, but we are struggling to be 'up there with the powers that be'. The donors have their requirements and they are struggling. The question for me is where do we start in trying to change mindsets" (Community Connections)

"The way we talk is based on simple language, normal conversation based on principles...It is integrated in all of our other work, so we live the principles ourselves - in our own personal lives and also in the organization..." (West Coast Community Foundation)

"We've been selectively working with groups that really are genuinely trying to not only focus on assets, but focus on building their capacity to act in communities and being supportive so that those communities can retain ownership of the process. It is very very difficult...When we go and visit people who are trying this (we hear that) actually it is easy at the community level, communities are ready for this. We are having a hard time in our organizations. It is really difficult to change our whole way of operating and it is also really hard to change the relationship we have with our donor because we have to have these predetermined results..." (Coady Institute)

What's in a name?

'we started calling it ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) and that was the biggest mistake we made. Because what we've done is we've created a method that people are now taking and not internalizing. … A better way of calling this is 'Building Citizen Power'…"
(Coady Institute)

"at least if we can inject back that energy that we had in the '80s to do for ourselves, I don't care what we call that…"
(CS Mott Foundation)

GROUP REFLECTIONS

GROUP 1

Reactions/ Themes

* Why are we here? What can we gain from coming together'
* If we agree with the principles, what now?
* To name or not to name – benefits and frustrations of labelin
* Get the stories out!!! (video, print, social media, newsletters e
* Education your donors, educate your peers

Key Questions

* How do we build respect for communities from NGOs/ outsi
  for themselves?
* Trust – how do you get people to pool assets when they don't trust each other?
* What do you do if the community gets excited but nothing comes of it?
* How do you define/ evaluate/ measure success?
* How do you work with government (or others) when they have an opposite mindset/ approach?
* Do you spread the approach in SA? Document/ collect the tools, processes and ideas being used by different organizations to share?

Group 2

* How do we use existing platforms to introduce an asset-based approach?
* How do we become agents for change in relation to asset-based development?
* What does 'a different way of working' mean or look like to us as civil society practitioners?
* Are we bold enough to challenge our donors with reference to asset based approaches and practices?

Group 3

* How do we use existing platforms to introduce an ABCD approach?
* How do we become agents of change in relation to ABCD?
* What does a 'different way of working' look or mean or look like to us as civil society practitioners?
* Are we bold enough to challenge our donors with reference to ABCD approaches and practice?

Group 4

Reactions/ Themes

- Stimulated by some stories we heard – 'truth telling that inspires'
- Refreshing to hear from new participants.
- Need to go 'back to basics', but what are the basics that we talk about, what is our understanding of the basics?
- Need a new language of development within our practice
- Need for more collective action – are we ready for this? Or are we the bottlenecks to community development ourselves?
- We need to identify the essence of self, embrace our own humanity/ citizenship
- Acknowledge that there is self organization in communities – our task is unlocking potential to ensure most for people we work with
- Aspect of inclusion
- Consistency – 'practice, practice, practice'

Key Questions

- Who is 'us' and who is 'them'
- Are we willing to share our knowledge and experiences?
- Do we have a good enough understanding of concepts like ABCD to introduce at community level or does our lack of understanding often create more confusion?
- Are we able to link communities to external partners/ role players?
- What is our common moral consensus?
- How do we create platforms for more community awareness and knowledge sharing to assist their development?
- Do we have the courage to engage with government?
- How do we ensure true community empowerment?
- Question of ownership – does some of what we say make sense?
- Do we really understand our 'target group'?
- How do we make the case for citizen driven development in SA?: In communities, there is: energy, vision, creativity, focus, leaders, self-organisation, social cohesion, integrity, authenticity, collective sharing, local knowledge, willingness, openness...

MOVING FORWARD

The group collectively voiced their support for asset-based approaches that are inherently people-centered and resonant with the principles that many share. The core issue seemed not to be so much about whether or not practitioners should support asset based or citizen led development, but rather how to do so.

Shifting paradigm and practice is particularly challenging in an environment where there is great pressure to conform and 'meet community needs' through projects and pre-defined outcomes. Conventional grant making has fostered a depressed and supply driven culture and has had a dramatic impact on the psychology within NGOs and the communities they operate in.

But shifting paradigms is not only a challenge within the donor and NGO community but also at the grassroots level where community leaders have also internalized poverty mindsets and amplified needs in order to attract resources. Dependency and entitlement attitudes are counterproductive and feed the status quo.

The dialogue brought to surface some fundamental questions:

- How do we revive the spirit of citizenship in South Africa? How can individuals and organizations foster citizen-led development as a lived experience (eg. do they contribute to the communities they live in?)
- How do we unlearn conditioning and shift deep-rooted culture and group dynamics within organizations and in field practice? How do we unlearn a dominant paradigm and listen to the rhythm in communities?
- How do we 'unblock' and free up information and resources available for community led development?

The group expressed interest in continuing to dialogue around such themes and to collectively explore ways in which to shift 'development speak' and consciously use appreciative inquiry with self and others.

It was felt that the action research proposed is timely and likely to be both relevant and worthwhile. A number of organizations expressed interest in actively supporting and contributing to the process.

In addition to the research, it was felt that a locally rooted curriculum is needed to popularise asset-based and citizen-led approaches to development. Local media and publications will also assist as well as a coordinating hub for knowledge management that will be facilitated by the core team.

NEXT STEPS...

The workshop agreed that a core team will co-ordinate activities to support a 'hub' of practitioners and organizations seeking to engage more deeply with asset-based development practices. The core team will primarily be an advisory body to give strategic input in terms of research, documentation and emerging activities. The team includes:

- Amy Tekie (GIBS)
- Anthea Davids Thomas (SCAT)
- Bernie Dolly (Ikhala Trust)
- Cheryldene Hector (Community Development Foundation of the Western Cape)
- Gavin Joachims (TCOE)
- Margaret Maans (West Coast Community Foundation)

Coady and GIBS will continue to explore possibilities of jointly offering accredited training in South Africa for asset-based development. GIBS further offered a venue for seminars and workshops and to play a role in research dissemination.

Ikhala Trust will continue to lead the action research component in partnership with Coady Institute. It was suggested that the research be extended to 12 months (rather than six). Besides the formal research component, there was interest amongst those present to generate and contribute other stories and create an open system for submissions. These stories could also be centrally stored.

An Asset-Based Development training manual is also available on request from Ikhala Trust who will be hosting a grantee training course in May 2011. The group was invited to send delegates and some committed themselves. Of particular interest is the possibility of writing stories in a free, creative and inspiring way, breaking out of the confines of bureaucracy. Some stories could also be captured on DVD.

Different people throughout the dialogue emphasized the need for local written and audiovisual material. Coady Institute also expressed a keen interest in learning from the experiences and innovations of the South African partners.

The TSDP will consider how it can continue to support dialogue, research and learning in support of citizen-led development. The TSDP was tasked to play a coordinating and linking role in this initial stage and to act as a clearing house for knowledge management. This will include 'holding' stories; audiovisual material and research outcomes. Coady also has nine graduates in South Africa who completed a full 3 week course in Canada. Although some have left their organizations, they have attempted to meet as a group and to sustain their engagement. Efforts will be made to engage these graduates as a resource.

Generally, the dialogue session was well received. Whilst there was at times some at the seemingly slow pace of change in the development sector, the workshop was a decisive and progressive step and has provided a concrete plan moving forward.

1t was evident that as a result of the effort of local partners (supported by Coady Institute), a critical mass has grown over the past few years of individuals and organizations passionate

about an asset-based approach. It seems that asset-based development not only vibrates in unison with their ideology but may also present an opportunity to revive the spirit of citizenship not just in communities but also amongst fellow South Africans working together.

Contributing Organisations

Coady Institute
CS Mott Foundation
Community Connections
Community Development Foundation Western Cape
DOCKDA Rural Development Agency
Eastern Cape NGO Coalition
Elsies River Advice Office
Gordon Institute of Business
Great Rustenburg Community Foundation
Ikhala Trust
Learning Trust
National Alliance for the Development of Community Advice Offices (NADCAO)
Social Change Assistance Trust
Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE)
Unima SA
West Coast Community Foundation
Westlake Community Foundation

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