

# Reality Television for Community Development

## *The Kwanda Initiative in South Africa*

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### **Abstract**

Kwanda was an innovative community development initiative of the Soul City Institute and partners. Five deprived communities were challenged to make their areas 'look better, feel better and work better' by addressing health and development issues. Responses to this challenge were documented in a 13-episode reality TV series that culminated in a viewer vote for the most successful community. The series attracted more than a million viewers on late-night television, and feedback indicated that many viewers were motivated to take action. The evaluation of the initiative led to the conclusion that Kwanda offers possibilities for using the reality TV format to foster community development and the scaling-up of development messaging. Importantly, Kwanda demonstrated that when communities organise on their own behalf, government is better able to deliver. The evaluation also raised several questions for the Kwanda partners which would need to be taken into account in future efforts.

**Keywords:** community development, reality television, Kwanda

### **Background**

Kwanda, an initiative of the South African Soul City Institute, was an innovative project aimed at mobilising communities to address key development issues. Kwanda centred around a 13-part 'community makeover' reality TV show broadcast in 2009. The show was the first of its kind, with teams from five communities challenged to make their communities "look better, feel better and work better" – the catchphrase of the show. In a live finale, viewers voted for the community they believed had best tackled the development issues facing it.

### *Development Goals*

The project focussed on four main, interlinked development goals: to prevent new HIV infections; to address alcohol abuse, violence and crime; to take care of vulnerable people in the community and to foster engagement in projects that strengthen livelihoods by generating income, encourage the growing of food or in other ways improve the quality of life in communities. The project aimed both to galvanise local development within the Kwanda communities and to inspire viewers across the country to take action in their own communities.

Five communities were selected from different areas of South Africa: Kwakwatsi, a township in the small Free State town of Koppies where unemployment is rife and there are few potential employers; Lephephane, a rural area near Tzaneen in Limpopo with a population of about 40.000 people, mainly under the age of 35; uMthwalume, a village on the KwaZulu-Natal coast, marked by political tensions and community divisions; Pefferville, a densely-populated, inner-city neighbourhood in East London in the Eastern Cape, described by participants at the start of the project as a place of gangsterism; and Tjakastad, a sprawling rural town off the beaten track in Mpumalanga that was also grappling with an ingrained culture of crime.

### *Format*

The 13 episodes were comprised as follows: episode 1 was the learning camp; episodes 2-11 focused on the communities (2 each); episode 12 was a recap and episode 13 a live programme where viewers had the chance to phone in and vote. The first 12 episodes were edited prior to broadcast. The series was complemented by a radio show, involving a range of radio stations, that gave other communities a chance to talk about how they are dealing with issues similar to those faced by the Kwanda communities.

Viewer participation was encouraged. Viewers could send in comments every week by mobile phone text messages (SMS or short message service) or by letter. They were also offered a different number to text for help with an issue, and were then referred to relevant government services, for example the Department of Social Development, through return SMSs. The Kwanda TV show attracted more than one million viewers on late-night television.

## **Using Mass Media for Community Development**

Kwanda brought together the combined experiences of the Soul City Institute and Seriti Institute. Soul City's model of social and behaviour change communication uses media, advocacy and social mobilisation targeting individuals, communities and the broader society. Seriti Institute focuses on strengthening community organisation for social, health and local economic development, and has a strong background in participatory approaches to community development. These recognise the need to engage with communities to identify local concerns and priorities instead of imposing solutions. The focus is on enabling community members to organise themselves to solve their own problems.

Soul City is regarded as a leader in the field of "edutainment" (an abbreviation for entertainment-education) and has been using popular media to convey social messages for nearly 20 years. Since 1992, Soul City has run 15 seasons of two edutainment series – *Soul City* and *Soul Buddyz*. These series targeted adults and 8 to 12 year-olds, respectively, each with a television series, a corresponding radio drama broadcast in nine of South Africa's 11 official languages, and print material. Soul City aimed to build on the success of these multi-media programmes to explore the use of reality TV for development. The Institute hoped to use the reality TV format to directly reflect real lived experiences rather than craft story lines based on target audience research. The popularity of the format is growing. If harnessed properly, it can show the complexity of development and put the issues and voices of marginalised groups not usually rep-

resented in the media on the national agenda. It therefore offers a different way to use mass media for community development.

While the Kwanda format has been criticised for using a competitive rather than collaborative model, in reality the competition was used as a tool to motivate teams to stay in the Kwanda process until the end and to hold audiences. Kwanda differed from the conventional reality TV shows in that there was no elimination, and teams won small rewards for the best efforts with various projects during the course of the series.

In South Africa, about 75% of South African households have access to a television set, with some 87% of the adult population (age 16-55) watching TV on a regular basis (Johnson et al 2010). Similarly, television is the most popular form of entertainment among teenagers, with more than two-thirds saying they watch television more than five times per week (Kaiser Family Foundation, online).

Creating a reality TV show about ordinary people trying to change the communities they live in also dovetailed with “communication for development” theory, which suggests that instead of being the subject of stories, poor and marginalised people can help shape the message. In a television documentary, the enquirer is a producer who has a question that s/he sets out to explore. In contrast, reality TV does not seek to answer a particular question. This means the format is potentially more powerful for viewers, because it allows the community to set its own agenda with regard to development initiatives, approaching new development challenges and to bring about change that is more civic driven, and therefore more likely to be lasting. Audiences are more likely to be affected by experiences that resonate closely with their own.

Kwanda used the reality TV format for a so-called ‘community makeover’ show, combined with community training and support to promote change in both individuals and the broader community. In this way, Kwanda differed from typical reality TV shows popular in South Africa, such as “Survivor”, “The Amazing Race” or “Extreme Makeover”. Kwanda had a social development aim; it did not involve backstabbing; participants were active shapers of the programme agenda rather than passive recipients, and real issues were tackled. Unlike most reality TV shows, Kwanda reflected the lives of people in their everyday setting. Viewers saw the harsh conditions people live under. This was something many South Africans had not appreciated – until the reality show took them inside residents’ shacks. For other South Africans, Kwanda reflected their reality, one with which they could identify.

Kwanda also differed from other reality shows in that the outcome was not predetermined. Events unfolded as the show progressed. The focus was on collective action -the performance of the team- rather than on individuals working towards a single prize.

The show revealed in a direct way the difficulties and challenges of community development, along with moments of spontaneous joy when participants succeeded in a task or rose to a challenge, like raising money for orphans and vulnerable children. The exercise of leadership in painful, real-life situations often made for fascinating TV. For example, two people stole money from the team in one community where violence was the usual way of sorting out problems. The group had to decide how to deal with this theft. Viewers were witness to community discussions and deliberations. Eventually residents decided to forgive the main person involved and to give him another chance, creating very emotional TV. In another community, group members had an authoritarian leader they could not get rid of, who used sheer patriarchal power to frustrate all the

efforts of a group of young women. While this was disturbing to watch, it reflected a common scenario in many communities.

## **Using Film**

Soul City and Seriti engaged independent producers for the Kwanda series. These producers were conscious of the potential effect of the camera on the behaviour of participants. The crews showed participants the footage at various intervals for their comments. Participants who had disclosed sensitive or personal information, such as being HIV positive, were shown the film footage before it was aired, and were asked for their permission to broadcast. The heightened self-esteem and sense of community identity experienced by participating community residents as a result of the media attention did help in the facilitation of team activities. Community members felt proud when they saw their communities on TV: “Before people didn’t know where this place is. You have to give them landmarks, like saying ‘it is next to Nelspruit’. So the TV series was able to give Tjakastad exposure”. (Focus Group Discussion, Social Surveys 2010)

Community development practitioners working for Soul City and Seriti Institute met with the teams and offered them coaching once every two weeks. These coaches reported that filming created a positive energy – people wanted to be on TV and also wanted to show that they were serious about the challenges they were undertaking.

Pefferville participants reported that the filming forced community members to be on their best behaviour. They also felt that the filming had accurately portrayed the social ills in their community – although one committee member felt that the team members were shown in a one-sided fashion, and that the film did not reflect how they had changed. Committee members from Kwakwatsi reported that TV created awareness among the community and encouraged residents to join Kwanda.

Filming also encouraged some local governments to get involved in their communities. Community members from Tjakastad reported that the film project resulted in the community receiving increased attention from the municipality. At times, the footage reflected actual engagements with government, with the municipality sometimes being portrayed in a bad light. The power of television to hold officials accountable was underlined, showing its potential to be used as a development tool to increase accountability.

## **Preparing for Kwanda: Selecting Communities and Participants**

Provincial, local and district stakeholders were consulted over site selection. The final selection was done in partnership with government and local community organisations. From the start, it was clear that the support of local government was crucial. In instances where Soul City was interested in working with a certain community but there was no strong local government structure in place, the community was not selected. The importance of local government was borne out during the show – the active support of local government was a key resource for the winning team. Every Kwanda community was able to forge stronger links with local government over the course of time.

After the sites were selected, volunteers were chosen in a process involving local organisations, the film crew, and local government. A team of one hundred residents

was selected from each community. These team members then undertook a rigorous, five-day community mapping exercise.

## **Mapping the Communities and Imagining Futures**

The participatory learning approaches associated with the work of Robert Chambers (see for example Chambers 2002) were adopted for the community mapping exercises done by each Kwanda team.

One part of social learning is reflecting on what is, and what has been: reaching some level of agreement about where we come from and what we see as important. The first step of the community mapping exercise entailed *mapping the past* of the community – constructing a timeline of events, ideas and personalities that shaped the community and made it what it is today.

The second step was to look at the physical *facilities and resources* in the community. These include sites where people gather together, like churches, schools, clinics, sports fields, businesses, taxi ranks, informal shops, crèches and cemeteries. Potential agricultural land was identified, as well as areas unsuitable for agriculture. Informal settlements and other housing areas were mapped along with water supply points. Problem areas were also identified, like crime hotspots, sites of environmental degradation and areas dangerous for children. In order to map these facilities, groups had to look at the various kinds of organisation in the community, including that established by traditional leaders and healers.

The third step was to reflect on the *strengths* of the community and why these were considered strengths. Groups identified strong leaders, vibrant organisations and beneficial customs. They also pinpointed underused resources.

The fourth step was to identify community *challenges* – such as crime, drug abuse, high unemployment, orphans, high levels of teenage pregnancies.

In the fifth step of the exercise, sub-teams were tasked with one of the identified challenges. These smaller groups then undertook *further research* into the problem, its causes, and various strategies that could be used by the team to address it.

After sharing this detailed research, the team worked together to *imagine the future* once they had created the kind of community they wanted to live in. This last step in the community mapping process was detailed, and led to proposals for immediate actions.

These initial dreams and immediate actions were later proved to be extremely modest – nobody in any of the community teams could have imagined the range and scale of activity that they would launch as the series progressed.

In each place, teams came to see their community with new eyes after the community mapping exercise. Many individuals gave testimony about the insights and new understandings they had gained. The community mapping exercise lasted for just under a week and enabled the team to understand the key issues facing their community, the status of community organisation, the resource base available to the community, the resource flows within it, political and other environmental factors affecting the community, the nature of community relationships with local government and other service providers, and historical factors affecting community development. This exercise meant that each team of participants shared an understanding of its context and the areas it would seek to improve. Crucially, this exercise allowed each team to forge a commitment to working

together towards community transformation. The community mapping exercise was not filmed, but formed a basis for future activity.

### **Lights, Camera, Action**

After the community mapping exercise, each team was split in two, with 50 members attending an intensive training course around HIV and HIV prevention. This course equipped them to offer peer education courses in their home communities. HIV prevention was a priority because of the high prevalence rates throughout South Africa and because it is a key strategic objective of the Soul City Institute. The second group of 50 attended the Kwanda Learning Camp, where they lived and worked with each other for one month.

The Kwanda Learning Camp used a methodology called the Organisation Workshop that emerged in Brazil, through the work of Clodomir Santos de Moraes, and which has been adapted in Mozambique, Botswana and Zimbabwe over the last 20 years (Carmen and Sobrado 2000).

The key objective of the Learning Camp was to enable Kwanda participants to learn how to organise their communities to address specific social challenges. Participants learned work organisation and task management skills by carrying out work identified and prioritised by the community. Participants attended interactive lessons each day; work took up the rest of their time. The organisers provided tools and equipment and negotiated contracts with the participants, who were paid as an enterprise for work that they contracted to do. This work ranged from building through agriculture to carrying out a household survey around vulnerable children.

An important aspect of the Learning Camp was bridging language and cultural differences within and between diverse groups. Teaching took place in Sesotho, SePedi, English and IsiZulu. Committee members from Pefferville and Kwakwatsi reported that this multi-lingual approach ensured that all participants understood the training. Committee members from Pefferville said that racial stereotypes were challenged through working together. Committee members from Kwakwatsi reported that there was initially discrimination at the camp on the basis of language, with some teams refusing to use a language that the other teams could understand. This was resolved over time by using the language issue as part of the learning experience. The Organisation Workshop method has also been successful in resolving tensions and promoting a collective identity in other South African settings. (CSVR/SWOP 2011)

Participants were encouraged to take ownership of the organization of the camp and to evolve more democratic systems. A good example of this was when the team voted out an authoritarian leader and replaced him with someone who they felt was more consultative.

The Learning Camp also provided an opportunity for participants to learn how to convene a community gathering, including several government departments as well as non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in HIV counselling and testing. Team members were able to undertake voluntary counselling and testing for HIV infection, and apply for identity documents, birth certificates and social grants.

Once the teams had returned to their homes, the five communities were followed for six months, during which time they had continuous feedback and coaching support. Kwanda used external coaches and local coaches who engaged with participants daily

to provide direction. This discipline of community coaching was an unanticipated result of the Kwanda initiative, and may become a more widely used approach.

Teams were filmed both during the Learning Camp and for four months afterwards, as they implemented various activities and challenges. The film crews lived in the Kwanda communities with the teams for the four months. At the end of six months, each of the five communities were revisited in preparation for the start of audience voting and the live finale.

Kwakwatsi won the R1 million prizes earmarked for a local development programme of the community's own design. The prize money was used to set up a chicken farm. However, the other communities also won smaller prizes. The "One Love" prize for the community that had done most to stop new HIV infections went to Lephaphane. The prize was 500 bicycles: children were taught to grow trees, and each child could earn a bicycle by trading 100 self-grown trees.

After the series ended, the work of the Kwanda teams was extended through the South African government's Community Work Programme (CWP). This programme provides ongoing opportunities for useful work in communities by paying stipends. All five Kwanda communities are now CWP sites, with the Kwanda project visible in the kinds of activities that are being carried out. The Kwanda process helped build the required capacity and leadership skills for implementing CWP. In the Kwanda communities, where unemployment figures are in the region of 50%, it made an important difference that 1,500 people are working for 2 days a week on jobs that the community deems useful, and earning enough to cover some basic expenses<sup>2</sup>.

## **Evaluation**

An external evaluation of the impact of Kwanda was conducted, with evaluators selected through a competitive closed tender process. This assessment took place about six months after the completion of the Kwanda process and explored two different aspects of the Kwanda initiative: the first at the level of the participating communities, and the second at the level of the audience and media.

In the community level assessment, evaluators examined the social and development changes within the Kwanda communities and assessed the extent to which these were considered to make the community look, feel and work better.

At the audience level, the evaluation assessed the extent to which Kwanda inspired people in other areas to be more aware of the social challenges facing their communities, and whether they were more willing to talk about these issues. Although there was no baseline to compare with, data from non-intervention communities offered some comparison, complemented with self-reported changes. To a limited extent, the evaluation also looked at whether there was any indication that members of non-Kwanda communities had been inspired to take action in their own communities (Social Surveys, 2010).

## **Methods of Evaluation**

The evaluation took place in all five participating communities and in two non-participating comparison communities: Thakgalang, a rural village outside Morebeng [Soekmeaar] in Limpopo Province, and Mamafubedu, a township of the small farming

town of Petrus Steyn in the Free State. These communities had access to the Kwanda TV series but were not directly part of the intervention.

The emphasis was on qualitative rather than quantitative research. Data collection methods included an extensive phase of desk research; focus group discussions; in-depth interviews; field observations and an analysis of the series.

A total of 40 in-depth interviews were conducted in both the Kwanda communities and the two non-participating communities. Interviews were held with Soul City staff members and partners, Kwanda coaches and committee members and other stakeholders including ward councilors, mayors, school principals and community representatives. In addition, 12 focus group discussions were conducted with Kwanda teams and members of the Kwanda communities. This was supplemented with additional information about viewers of the Kwanda series gained from audience ratings per episode, SMSs and letters received from viewers.

## **Findings**

### *Community Level*

The evaluation assessed the impact at community level on the four development areas identified: prevention of HIV and AIDS; reduction of alcohol abuse, violence and crime; support for vulnerable people in the community; and strengthening of livelihoods.

### *Prevention of HIV and AIDS*

The results indicated that the HIV /AIDS prevention activities conducted within communities fostered discussion and awareness about the pandemic as well as about responsible sexual behavior and sexual rights. “The community has been exposed in the matter of HIV and AIDS. Not to say it is enough. According to me it still needs campaigns but awareness is there because people are able to disclose”, said a Lephaphane committee member (Social Surveys, 2010). The process also demonstrated that the leadership skills taught during the training camp had been taken on board by many of the Kwanda team members and could be translated into effective leadership activities.

In contrast, residents in the non-participating communities that had attempted to initiate HIV and AIDS-related activities (although not as a result of seeing Kwanda) had been less successful in their endeavors. The results of the evaluation suggest that the leadership skills participating communities gained through the Kwanda process, and the support they received, increased their likelihood of success with HIV and AIDS activities. The general sense of hopelessness around this focus area, observable in the control communities, was absent in the Kwanda communities at the time of the evaluation.

### *Reduction of Alcohol Abuse, Violence and Crime*

The activities to address crime and violence were generally successful. In most communities, this was because of the focus on partnerships, good leadership and community participation. The results indicated that although some teams needed additional help in building community solidarity against crime, including violent inter-personal crime, the process of tackling these problems generated respect between community members.

This was not true of non-participating communities, suggesting that the attitude change in participating communities was as a result of the Kwanda process.

Activities focused heavily on establishing partnerships between the police and local community policing forums (CPFs), and on re-establishing and strengthening the CPFs. These partnerships in turn contributed to enhancing law and order. In Tjakastad, tackling gang warfare was a priority, and the team forged a comprehensive strategy for doing this. In a creative move, which had longer-term value, a former gang leader was elected as chairperson of the team. This led to an open discussion about the problem of gangs in the community.

One of the more difficult problem areas was alcohol abuse. Activities designed to address this issue involved forging partnerships with tavern owners. The aim was to get their cooperation in reducing taverns' operating hours, in order to minimise overall alcohol consumption and underage drinking in taverns. These activities were not always successful, but they did heighten awareness and reduce the acceptance of underage drinking and drinking-related violence. In uMthwalume, community members reported that "the tavern now opens at 10am and closes at 10 pm which is a very big and positive change as taverns used to operate 24 hours". (Focus Group Discussion, Social Surveys, 2010)

### *Support for Vulnerable People in the Community*

All the community teams conducted door-to-door visits to do home-based care. Teams identified vulnerable people, including orphans and sick people. Food gardens were planted, and people were given clothes and others household items. In uMthwalume, for example, the team found an old, malnourished women sleeping on the floor who was left alone most of the day. They started caring for her: they cleaned her house, found her a bed, fed her and took her to hospital.

The Kwanda teams were able to identify a number of issues around vulnerable children and youth that needed to be addressed. These included a worrying acceptance by communities of school truancy. Most of the teams elected to take a visible stand against such behaviour, and in the process helped to get parents to take more responsibility for their children's behaviour. This was achieved by going from door to door and speaking to parents and, where necessary, intervening when parents were not sending their children to school. These activities were perceived to have resulted in a decline in school absenteeism and daytime drinking at taverns.

All the Kwanda teams were successful in establishing partnerships with relevant government departments and community-based organisations. These bodies then assisted in registering needy people for social grants and helping residents to get birth certificates and ID documents. Tjakastad community members reported that "at least some of the children are now receiving social grants. Even on the street, kids they intervene and try to understand the problems that led to children being on the streets. Through their interventions many children went back home and ultimately back to school, there is even a soup kitchen to help poor families." (Focus Group Discussion, Social Surveys, 2010)

The teams essentially acted as a link between local government and the community.

This was in stark contrast to the non-participant control communities, where limited assistance was received from local authorities when residents tried to help vulnerable people such as orphans.

### *Strengthening of Livelihoods*

Activities aimed at strengthening livelihoods included food gardens, breeding chickens, planting trees and any other projects that could contribute to basic household survival. During the Kwanda process, it was found that these activities were more likely to be effective when undertaken on a more collective basis and with community support. With the help of Kwanda, enterprises could depend on the support of their fellow community members, unlike in non-participating communities. “The community is very happy with Kwanda. There is a group that’s doing the beads because we taught them that not using your hands won’t help you. There are groups that do the beads, sewing clothes and others making shoes and so on. This is good and life goes on” (Focus Group Discussion, Social Surveys, 2010).

The challenges the enterprises faced included a lack of stock, equipment, infrastructure, land and transport necessary to sustain and grow them. Rural enterprises were most affected. Other more general problems included a lack of business and marketing skills, and the lack of structural support available to small and micro businesses. Many participants found dealing with small business agencies a lengthy, cumbersome and frustrating experience. Lobbying for state agencies to assist small businesses was not successful.

### **Audience Level**

The Kwanda series was intended to expose the circumstances of different communities in a way that encouraged other communities to identify and feel inspired to act. Soul City was aware that for real change to happen in communities it had to create an infrastructure of support for groups that wanted to take action. The infrastructure it created needed to be one that viewing communities could seek. For example, the series modelled the different services offered by government, and how communities can have access to these. Soul City also developed a booklet with ideas on how to start an enterprise that can deal with various social challenges. During Episode 13, Soul City brought to the studio some community members who had been inspired by Kwanda and started actions in their own communities, thus showing what is possible.

The series proved not only to be good entertainment that broke the mould of reality TV; it also inspired people in other areas to take action to improve their areas. Some communities launched initiatives that they called ‘Kwanda’, and for more than a year after the show the organisers were still receiving correspondence from organisations and individuals who had been motivated to work with others to better their lives.

Although there is only limited evidence to suggest that the show brought about significant behaviour change among viewers, these responses do suggest that the show was understood by viewers and possibly encouraged individuals to think about the role community members can play in uplifting themselves. Responses further suggest that the show tapped into relevant issues, provided a hopeful message for viewers and encouraged neighbouring community members to engage with both the Kwanda teams and local government to improve their well-being. A Pefferville councillor reported that filming had generated interest among local communities outside Pefferville, who then approached the municipality for help.

### *Viewership and Audience Reception*

Viewership ratings indicate that the average number of viewers per episode was 1.366.836 people, and that these figures remained relatively constant (SAARF, 2011). Viewers' responses were evaluated through an analysis of viewer SMSs and letters, and through interviews conducted in the two control communities during the evaluation of the project.

The results indicate that viewers identified with the social issues facing the participating communities and were inspired and motivated by the message that communities can help themselves. The reality format also encouraged viewers to think about issues such as personal accountability and teamwork. Focus group data from the non-participating communities showed that the series was motivational for community-based organisations and community members: "It made me look at the programmes we have in the organisation and I said if other people can do this and that why not us, even if we don't have means, why don't we deal with this problem. That was the only think I thought about" (Focus Group Discussion, Social Surveys, 2010).

Viewers generally expressed support for the series, and the wish for similar projects in their own communities.

### *Viewer SMS Responses*

A total of 6.776 SMSs were sent by viewers to the live comment crawler during the series. The number of SMSs received fluctuated for different episodes. This was because viewers were not asked to respond to questions for every episode. In addition, the issues covered in certain episodes may have resonated more with the audience. The high proportion of SMSs received for episodes two and three were messages of support for the Kwakwatsi community and general queries about Kwanda. From episode four onwards, SMSs were no longer featured in the strap line. Viewers were asked instead to send in responses to questions posed during the show. The surges in SMSs in episodes seven and ten were related to the questions that viewers were asked to respond to. The SMSs received for episode seven related to the issue of alcohol abuse, and the SMSs received for episode ten were about youth unemployment, as well as the decision in Tjakastad to include a gang member in the episode

The uMthwalume team had a painful lesson around leadership. The chairman was charismatic but wanted control over all aspects of the initiative. The episodes around this series of events resulted in many text messages from viewers with comments on his leadership style.

In general, the SMS indicated that the Kwanda series content touched on social issues that were important to viewers. The SMS responses also indicated that the series was pitched at the right level and encouraged viewers to think about social issues in their own communities.

While most viewers generally supported the series and believed that it could make a difference in their own communities, some were sceptical about the sustainability of certain initiatives to bringing about long-term change. In responses to the Tjakastad episodes, for example, the viewers were divided on a decision about forming soccer clubs to get youth off the streets. Some stated that the soccer clubs would help to get the youth off the streets, while others thought this would only be the case for the hours the youth spent on the field.

### *Letters Received from Viewers*

A total of 94 letters were received, from both individuals and organisations. Although this figure is low, it is significant in a country where people tend not to write letters. A few commercial businesses and larger non-governmental organisations sent in letters. Most of the letters were received from community-based organisations including care groups; youth groups; sports groups; NGOs and religious groups. Some of them do work similar to Kwanda and were interested in the series. Most letters received from organisations included requests for assistance with funding and material. In response, Soul City sent the Kwanda resource booklet, which includes a section on places where communities can receive help. Other organisations asked for managerial skills training, furniture, support, sponsorship, mentoring, building materials or any other forms of support that the Kwanda team could offer. Some also expressed a desire for the Kwanda team to visit their organisations to see the community development work that they do.

Letters received from individuals addressed various topics such as how to join or participate in Kwanda; general information on the project; and support to start their own small business or draw up a business plan. Kwanda, therefore, motivated certain individuals to explore ways to create jobs. Letters were also received from prisoners looking to get involved with Kwanda after being released from prison or prisoners wanting to implement Kwanda in their respective jails.

The Kwanda TV series therefore seems to have had particular appeal for individuals who were already working for community-based organisations or already starting their own enterprises.

## **Discussion**

Kwanda involved a change in the way people did things, from how they had to take the initiative to set up activities to being responsible for finances and engaging with local authorities about the delivery of services. This was not only true for the 100 people in each team, but also for their broader community. In South Africa, where people have become accustomed to waiting for the state to deliver services, houses and jobs, this was a cultural transformation.

If we understand culture to be “designs for living that are based on the accumulated knowledge of a people, encoded in their language, and embodied in the physical artefacts, beliefs, values, customs and activities that have been passed down from one generation to the next” (Cole and Cole 2001: 36), the Kwanda process brought about a profound cultural change, in that the activities shaping the everyday lives of people changed dramatically.

This raises questions about development practice, specifically the methods used to stimulate or catalyse self-directed action in others. As the discourse around civic -driven change has revealed, development practice has often proceeded from the wrong premises (Fowler and Biekard 2008).

The search for a development method for Kwanda boiled down to answering a single question: how can hundreds of people engage in *self-directed activity*, seeking to improve their lives and the conditions in which they live? In the phrase that became famous through the TV show, how do we make our communities *look better, feel better and work better*? Change at this scale requires that there is *social learning*, where many people learn and change behaviour at the same time. It also requires new and varied

kinds of organisation. And, since local circumstances differ subtly from area to area it is not possible for any development practitioner to suggest these new ways of being and doing. These new methods have to be discovered by the people generating the activities that will, over time, create new cultural patterns. Truly autonomous organisation is necessary, characterised by ongoing learning.

Many participants point to the month-long Learning Camp as the time and process that galvanised the teams to launch the activities necessary to change the way of life in the Kwanda communities. The camp was activity-based, combining theoretical and practical training. Teams were given projects and challenges including how to settle disputes. The process was mainly participant-driven, with coaches offering guidance. Groups learned the value of working as a team, and were encouraged to organise themselves as a means of accessing the resources they desired.

The leadership skills taught during the Learning Camp and the leadership roles undertaken by the Kwanda teams were largely sustained through the CWP after the Kwanda process had ended. Kwanda team members were selected for leadership positions in the CWP, and there was generally positive feedback about their performance. Many of the community development activities started during the Kwanda process were continued under the CWP. This has helped to ensure the sustainability and growth of much of this community development.

## **Conclusion**

The Kwanda initiative was successful because it showed what communities can achieve if they organise themselves. It also showed how television can be a useful tool for making authorities and leaders more accountable. The Community Work Programme was a necessary intervention to ensure that the teams continued with their work and were able to recruit more community members. However, in some teams this intervention created tension because group members regarded it as a separate programme and not part of Kwanda. This was partly because, as a government project, the Community Work Programme had its own selection criteria and management processes, which some team members felt to be excluding.

Team members' inability to accept changes to the project after the filming of Kwanda pointed to the need for Soul City to maintain a degree of interaction and to continue mentoring teams for a long period after the conclusion of the filming. Seriti Institute, which manages the Community Work Programme, offered most of the community support. However, it was evident that for the Kwanda teams to work more smoothly with the Community Work Program teams, Soul City and Seriti needed to work together more closely with these communities.

This need for continuous community coaching raises the questions of for how long and to what extent an organisation is obliged to support a community once it has set a community initiative in motion. In an ideal world, government bodies and other community organisations would step in. But in practice, how far does Soul City's responsibility extend for the integrity of a process it has set in motion?

Soul City has embarked on learning convocations/workshops within each community to try to answer these questions and to find out what worked for individual communities. The amount of ongoing support that Soul City is required to offer to the Kwanda

communities will determine the pace at which it will extend the Kwanda initiative to other communities.

Kwanda has exciting potential to promote meaningful community development and at the same time scale up development messaging by using a reality TV format that inspires viewers to tackle challenges in their own communities. By reflecting the reality of the lives of many viewers, it can be both aspirational and inspirational. It affirms communities and promotes accountability among community members and authorities.

Kwanda discovered a deep well of positive energy in communities that can be tapped into. Communities are capable of finding solutions given the right environment and resources. In particular, Kwanda showed that when communities organise themselves it becomes easier for government to deliver services.

## Notes

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2. The CWP is designed to create an employment safety net by providing participants with typically two days of work a week or eight days a month. By April 2011, there were 74 sites around the country. All five Kwanda sites are now CWP sites and many of the community activities prioritised through the Kwanda mapping exercise are being continued by the CWP. See [www.cogta.gov.za/cwp](http://www.cogta.gov.za/cwp) for more information.

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