

# **RENEILWE Community Engagement Programme: A Transformative Township Developmental Plan**

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## **Abstract**

Township communities in the democratic South Africa are still grappling with the injustices of the pre-democratic era, resulting in social fragmentation and weakened social networks and engagement platforms. Successful social investment programmes need to be hinged upon robust and sustainable community engagement fora that enhances participation, opinion sharing, concept/project ownership, more perspectives and participant value-affirmations and contribution-recognition.

RENEILWE Community Engagement model, a multi-layered, interdisciplinary and comprehensive socio-cultural and economic growth strategy, is aimed at engaging communities through the implementation of varied engagement and participatory methods. Community engagement is technically a term also known as citizen/civic engagement or collective interaction that uses various approaches to include people in matters of public concern for social change. Participatory and transformative approaches with the goal of increasing awareness and empowering communities to take charge of their transformation are the primary means of expected inclusion in the RENEILWE community interaction programme.

Key Words: Community Development, Community Engagement, Economic Development, Township communities, Social Change, Social Cohesion,

## **Introduction**

RENEILWE Community Engagement Plan is a multilayered, interdisciplinary and holistic socio-cultural and economic development plan with a mission to empower communities through the application of various engagement and participatory strategies. Theoretically, community engagement is a concept also known as citizen/civic engagement or public participation, which uses multi-methods to engage citizens on issues of public interest for social change (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Scholars have further described community engagement as a deliberate strategic intent to draw people outside government to participate and have influence in policy decision-making for service plans that involve their natural habitat (Morgan-Trimmer, 2014).

The major means of envisaged engagement for the *RENEILWE* community engagement plan is participatory and transformational approaches with the intention of conscientizing and encouraging communities to take ownership of their transformation (Kretzmann,2010).

*RENEILWE* is intended to engage and uplift communities in need of renewal to become hubs of communal renewal initiatives and sustainable development. It further intends to be instrumental in fast-tracking and facilitating the implementation of a number of initiatives to transform and better integrate these areas within the broader communities of which they are a part (Maharajan,2014). The Plan incorporates asset-based community engagement which takes into cognizance six broad types of assets (namely, skills, voluntary associations, NGOs & NPOs, physical, historical and cultural assets) and the social capital of communities to foster and inculcate a culture of community wellness (Kretzmann,2010).

## **Background**

Townships have largely operated and functioned in isolation from the mainstream economy and society, and have been associated with racial segregation, exclusion, and the marginal provision of services and economic opportunities

(Aslam, 2014). According to the World Bank study (2014) -which was based on the informal settlement of Diepsloot in the Gauteng province- the growth potential of the South African economy lies in improving the investment climate in townships. In view of the above and in pursuit of addressing this situation, the *RENEILWE* plan proposes an approach that recognizes that, while there are development needs and empowerment opportunities specific to each community engagement need, it is also necessary to harness a project response of renewal that address community needs as a conglomerate in order to accelerate intended initiatives broadly and nationally. The *RENEILWE* plan is committed to tailoring the community response project to specific societal needs as an enablement for innovative learning that meets and achieves set goals through standards of itexcellence.

According to the *Township Transformation Timeline Report* (2009), over the years, Townships have developed an iconic profile in South African society, representing the very heart of where the struggle for freedom was waged, where many of today's leaders, including famous politicians, artists, business icons, sportsmen and women were born and grew up. They thus carry a historical value that is worth noting, valuing and preserving. A subsequent report to the aforementioned report presents the other side of the story by stating that, in many ways, the townships, and especially the informal settlements, are similar to the slums in much of the developing world, although central planning and purpose has gone into some of the larger South African townships (Maharajan ed,2014s). Over the years there has been a proliferation of informal settlements with more households continuing to live in informal settlements where there is lack of full access to municipal services. The influx of immigrants into areas that considered as business hubs carries the concomitant result of services supply exceeding demand, in relation to available housing and infrastructural resources. *RENEILWE* is conceptualized in partial cognition of and responsiveness to Aslam's (2014) observation that there is a proliferation of ideas about what needs to be done to improve the economy of townships, that require the incentivization and mobilization of local communities to urgently implement appropriate solutions.

## **Problem**

A report by Statistics South Africa (2018) shows that South Africa is estimated to receive a net immigration of 1,02 million people between 2016 and 2021, with most international migrants settling in Gauteng (47,5%) while the least are found in the Northern Cape province (0,7%). The primary reason for the high population density in Gauteng is that it is considered the economic hub of the country, attracting international migrants as well as domestic migrants from rural provinces such as Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. The same applies to, for example, Cape Town, which attracts the people of adjacent rural areas for employment opportunities. This results in informal settlements being concentrated in the economic hubs with concomitant overcrowding conditions, resulting in the need for community renewal programmes such as the one envisioned through *RENEILWE*.

### **Rationale for Reneilwe Community Engagement Plan**

*RENEILWE*, as a multi-conceptual plan for community engagement, is derived from the agency thinking approach, which is embedded in pathways thinking that has its roots in Hope Theory (Tong, et.al.,2010; Snyder,2000). Agency thinking refers to an individual's determination to achieve certain goals, despite possible obstacles, while pathway thinking refers to the ways in which an individual believes they can achieve these goals of transformation. The argument presented here is that because of the conditions of poverty that prevail in most townships, communities are usually characterized by apathy, despondency and other associated social ills (Mood and Johnson, 2014). The various concepts of the *RENEILWE* Community Engagement plan, as outlined below, will be used as pathways of contributing towards counteracting these potentially disempowering conditions and harnessing the collective agency of communities towards the common good.

### **Conceptualisation and Operationalisation of Reneilwe**

The basic meaning of the term derives from the Sotho language and, roughly translated, it means “we have been given or granted”. In the context of this discussion and by, connotation, it means that we have been endowed with God-given abilities to be creative in improving our living conditions, regardless of what

they are.

CONCEPT		OPERATIONALIZATION
<b>R</b>	<b>RENEW</b>	Assess and raise consciousness/awareness to counter the lack of motivation, disillusion and disenchantment within communities in need of renewal through agency thinking and enthusing communities with hope (Snyder,2010; Tong et al,2010).
<b>E</b>	<b>ENGAGE</b>	Active and participatory dialogue that seeks to answer these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we actively participate in transforming our society?</li> <li>• How do we conceptualise a better community for ourselves?</li> <li>• What is our community’s organizing principle?</li> </ul> This engagement will be facilitated through surveys, questions and structured group discussions (Calder & Beckie, 2012; Sarkissian, Hurford and Wemnan ,2010).
<b>N</b>	<b>NURTURE</b>	Community engaged methods nurture a community's assets and strengths, which makes policy recommendations more effective and sustainable. As such, Urban researchers are increasingly engaging the community to strengthen research designs, advance equity and inclusion, and improve policy impact (Sarkissian et al,2010 ).
<b>I</b>	<b>INNOVATE</b>	This aspect inculcates a culture of: “We can do this; We are better than this!” The purpose at this level is to inspire individual and collective entrepreneurial innovation that will stimulate sustainable endeavours (Piscione, 2019, Parwez,). This consciousness draws from technological innovations to facilitate community and civic

		engagement (Gilman,2015).
<b>E</b>	<b>EMPOWER</b>	Activate renewal by engaging community members in a para-agency thinking (change agency) in the community to create platforms/points of departure for mobilising community members to buy into self-empowerment initiatives (Steiner and Farmer, 2017).
<b>L</b>	<b>LEARN</b>	The concept of learning in this context is couched within the Transformative Learning theory for adults, as conceptualized by Mezirow (2000).
<b>W</b>	<b>WITH</b>	A preposition that means, accompanied by or having or possessing something or a particular quality ( Fowler, & Fowler). In this context this relates to social cohesiveness and community of practice.
<b>E</b>	<b>EXCELLENCE</b>	This attribute is commonly used to describe something that goes beyond the ordinary. In this context it is associated with ‘going the extra mile’ or ‘going beyond the call of duty or what would ordinarily be expected or required.’  The Cambridge International Dictionary defines this term simply as, “extremely good”.

## Conclusion

The *RENEILWE* community Engagement Plan is, in essence, a tool that is geared towards harnessing the collective assets of the community in transformative developmental efforts. It is envisaged that, if applied appropriately, it carries the potential of transforming communities into holistically transformative and beneficial living spaces. Key to its approach is its participatory basis which provides an opportunity for all stakeholders, particularly communities, to have a say and ownership of development initiatives or projects going on in their areas. It further provides a sense of “shareholding” in structures or initiatives that are planned collectively for enhancement of township livelihoods, development and growth.

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