

Roads and Enterprise Development Programme (REDP)
Field Trip Report

By Bronwyn Jacobs

Experience

The REDP field trip took place over five days and was not only interesting but also exposed more information than previously thought. The fieldwork revealed, how the staff on the projects in Queenstown, Butterworth and Mthatha feverishly work on the roads in the Eastern Cape, explaining which products are used in the various layers that make up the roads, the health and safety alongside the making of South African roads.

The fieldtrip put faces to “those men” we drive pass when using the roads, and revealed who makes our roads, their trials and tribulations as well as their passion for ensuring the roads safely transport a nation and all who travel to our beautiful country. The men and women on the project expressed and truly live with respect for other life forms other than human when undertaking their jobs. At no one time was it played down and was refreshing to learn of the importance Coega REDP project has placed on ensuring environmental rules and regulations are upheld and that these very rules are being obeyed at all times. In a changing world it is safe to report that environmental concerns are taken into consideration and staff is conscioutised too in their training.

The experience was challenging at times however, there was nothing that was not made possible with the three Engineers at each project. People from all walks of life were interviewed. The positive attitude, acknowledgement of growth and development as a result of the project’s roll out was very evident at every interview. No hour was too late, thus a dinner after eight pm revealed the level of gratitude and humility displayed by Mr. Mr. Zwai CEO was overwhelming. He spoke into the night of the validation and humility to work alongside major companies as the confidence earned through the experience afforded not only allowed him to develop professionally but spoke at times emotionally about the ripple effect and the many people who have benefited. This was further expressed after speaking to Mr Eddie Tini, Taxi Driver and Owner. Tini passionately spoke of his ability to now become self-employed because of the roads. It was after speaking to Tini that he smiled and said he had never thought about his success and growth and thanked the interview process for making him aware, that the road was the catalyst for his taxi business flourishing.

Laughing, he admitted, he has bought less tyres for his taxi this year than previous years, now that the roads are better maintained however begged for more development in the area of Butterworth. He is forced to park his taxi 500km away from his home as there is no tarred roads leading to houses on the hill where he lives.

The staff working on the project was not only grateful but also passionate about roads and the maintenance thereof. The attitude and work ethic was what I was most impressed with. Every person in their employed capacity was competent and no one area undertaking maintenance was over laden with staff. In our first day’s experience in Mthatha, the staff completed a task of repair with care, precision and safety to themselves and the road users. Queenstown residents both the General Dealer General, Mr. Simon Thengumthottathil and Mr. Willem Venter Manager, Jacksons Universal, GM Franchise, were complementary of the roads being maintained in their area.

While the nature of business improved for Mr. Venter with more SUV's and bakkie sales, the General Dealer farther down the same road's business declined however not due to the roads but to the emerging "spaza" shops that have now mushroomed. His reply was people's ability to buy cars and travel further away on the very roads maintained meant they had more options.

Safety on the roads has been taken very seriously and I was pleased to note that the caliber staff were not only highly literate about safety but used their knowledge gained thus far on the project to improve the lives of their communities too. Mr Wilson, Safety Officer, Queenstown couples his expertise with Theological studies and works with Governing Bodies of various schools in Queenstown educating scholars, teachers and crèches in the area about safety. The staff under his protection was appropriately dressed for safety while working on the roads. All three-safety officers reported they had not had any accidents to date.

It was refreshing to see women at part of the construction teams at all three towns visited. Women, eager to do more than is required of them because they can was the resounding feedback received. While it was mentioned, having women on the job is a new phenomenon, Safety Officer, Mr. Lwandlekazi Mbinda, from the Butterworth project, stated they bring a different dynamic to the work place. The ladies in Queenstown are reported to be involved with and assist in basic admin too. Mr. Flatela stated his two female staff members impressed him when they took the initiative walked a long distance to request employment. Their commitment, reliability and willingness to learn more have encouraged him to keep them on permanently.

At all three sites, knowledge gained was reported as not only being helpful for purposes of maintaining the roads. I was informed more than once that knowledge gained to date had positively impacted the manner in which the staff interact with each other on the job as well as prepared them for future employment. Training was carried out, on site, by SABITA (South African Bitumen Association). Training for grass cutting, for all the roads, in turn acquired certificates for their training to date, as well as continuous life skill training undertaken by Faith and Hope NGO. Butterworth's staff complement presented 42 opportunities but currently holds a complement of 15 permanent staff members. Each one bread winners. Total of 3 women to date are on the payroll.

Success

Staff has all received training, which they reported has benefitted them professionally and domestically. Every staff member saw the opportunity afforded as a stepping-stone. An ethos of growth, upward mobility and development was alive on every site visited. A sense of camaraderie, strong work ethic and efficiency were evident. The positive validation of being employed was further evident in how the men responded, their body language conveyed positive sense of self too.

The 5 days was in my view a total success. The planning was well orchestrated making the task much easier. The relationships formed and in the name of constructive reporting for what was deemed good drew responses. The positive energy, messages of encouragement and gratitude are evident that while much more does need to be rolled out, every South African needs to participate to ensure all citizens benefit.

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