Learnings from Seriti TALKS | Seriti's Theory of Change

Seriti Institute held the inaugural Seriti TALKS on Friday, 26th October 2018. Participants from a wide cross-section of civil society attended, including from the public, private and non-profit sectors. A distinguished line-up of speakers presented at these talks:

❖ Kathy Nicolaou of GTAC and Liesel Eksteen of YES spoke to the topic of **"Organisations are Effective"** and emphasised the role of innovation, iterative adaptation in the design and implementation of programme interventions, a willingness to experiment, the need to develop teamship, and the insight that micro-jobbing (the growing phenomenon of people earning money by performing piece jobs for companies) can actually be seen as an opportunity for creating productive work opportunities.

❖ Dr Kate Philip shared her vast experience in supporting public employment programmes and brought insights from her recent book: *Markets on the Margins* to the issue of ensuring that **"Productive Work is Done"** in community development practice. The importance of people working, generating livelihoods and feeling included was linked to promoting social cohesion in communities and underscored the understanding that there is a social value and benefit that accrues to society at large when people are productively engaged in work activity or are employed.

❖ Wandile Sihlobo of the Agricultural Business Chamber made valuable contributions to the programme design theme of **"Land, Natural and other Resources are Optimally Used"**, which relates to promoting environmental sustainability in the implementation of community development interventions. The importance of viable agricultural models and successful land reform outcomes were stressed as there is a need to align the objectives of food security, economic development and restitution with the environmental realities that working within a sustainability framework entails.

❖ Dr Harry Teifel of Disruptas brought a technologist's perspective to the design and implementation of community development initiatives aimed at making **"Social Enterprises and SMEs Effective"** through an exploration of the new pathways presented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the network linkages created by technology.

Key learnings from the sessions are captured below according to theme. Seriti employed the use of Mentimeter.com to facilitate real-time participation from attendees on three questions which arose during the course of discussions. The results of these and the points raised in group plenary are shown below on page 3.

Organisations are Effective

The role of effective organisations in transforming communities and promoting local economic development was emphasised. To enable effective organisations, interventions in community development practice need to be (1) problem driven, (2) make use of iterative adaptation, and (3) be open to experimentation. The ability to adapt and innovate was seen to be critical to achieving scalability in any intervention, which is paramount to generating inclusive growth. Programme design should be informed by dynamic consultation with community stakeholders, especially the youth, to remain flexible in the implementation pathway and be open to participatory learning. Participatory process was highlighted as being key to transfer of soft skills in entrepreneurship and promoting small business development. Growing organisational literacy through community development work was understood to require an understanding of complex contexts across different geographies and diverse groups.

Productive Work is Done

The statement: "Employment matters too much to leave to markets!" informed the gravitas of the need to create productive work opportunities. The usefulness of public employment programmes, as a way to unlock the social value of labour, was highlighted in its ability to be readily scalable. Alternative avenues for unlocking the social value of labour in community development practice must, therefore, take advantage of opportunities for new forms of partnership. The net must be cast more widely to involve participation from the private sector and civil society in creating productive work. Creating sustainable work opportunities was shown to be about moving away from an exit-based model, toward recognising the need to support community businesses and start-ups until these entities are self-sufficient. Developing community-based service offerings as opposed to product offerings was seen as a way to overcome the dominance of big commercial manufacturers and tap into existing market opportunities. Community consultation is key to programme design as the community is integral to mapping out the opportunities and threats in a particular context and to knowing what work will add value to their community.

Land, Natural and other Resources are Optimally Used

This theme was addressed through the pressing context of agriculture and food security, and land reform in South Africa. A brief forecast of possible scenarios revealed that when it comes to using natural resources sustainably and to the benefit of the poor, public-private partnerships are needed to ensure stable, equitable, environmentally sustainable and financially viable outcomes from community development interventions. Rural development is potentially a major growth area for the economy, and civil society can play a role in forming linkages and sharing knowledge of existing networks to achieve successful land restitution outcomes which place the agri-economy on a sustainable trajectory. Success in this area requires accurate analysis of the trade-offs, and collaborative planning and implementation.

Social Enterprises and SMEs are Effective

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the rapid advance of technological innovation was shown to open avenues for strengthening social enterprises, local economies and SMEs. New technologies and the social networks these create were seen to present major opportunities for promoting growth in value add and democratisation of market benefits. Technology was highlighted for its role in adding value to existing roles of economic participants and developing new markets through its ability to help better facilitate people working together and cooperating. In this way, technology was seen to present an opportunity to effect systemic-level change which is socially and economically beneficial. The distinction between workers and capitalists was argued to be less significant as new technologies and networks of information increasingly promote cooperation and enable everyone to be 'participants' in the new economy.

'Seriti' in the Landscape

These learnings are summarised as follows: A comprehensive community development initiative, which fosters socially healthy and economically vibrant communities, promoting sustainable livelihoods, dignity and prosperity, will be holistic in its design. Programme interventions across these four outcome areas must intersect and should be mutually reinforcing. Community development practice and intergovernmental policymaking must align around creating functioning and self-reliant organisations grown through enterprise development, training and skills transfer, and connecting people with technology, networks and markets as well as ongoing technical support. The social value of people being engaged in productive work must be better understood when measured against the costs of a business-as-usual approach to improving living standards and developing the economy. The value of land and natural resources, including the services it provides, must be allocated so as to advance social justice and economic prosperity for more people while ensuring long-term environmental sustainability. Amid this, the youth need to be given space to pioneer enterprising ideas and be a part of innovation and economic growth. The picture is of communities at ease with seizing opportunities and facing challenges.

Participant Insights from Mentimeter.com

What should Seriti be doing in facilitating communities to do productive work?

"Enable people to make the grass greener where they are."

- Local production for local consumption can work if not in competition with big corporations
- Access to high value markets
- Skills for new opportunities
- Ongoing enterprise support

Where should Seriti start if it wants to build effective organisations?

"Building effective teams is about allowing space for dissenting voices."

- Be client-centred
- Seize the gaps / niche markets
- Innovate, adapt and iterate
- Be rooted in the community context

What can Seriti do to harness the positive potential of technology?

"Technology can be an enabler of people-centric change and cooperation."

- Tech facilitates new networks
- Simplify innovations in tech to make it usable and accessible
- Scale ensures economic sustainability
- Tech strengthens cooperation

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