

Border Rural Committee



The Cata Story

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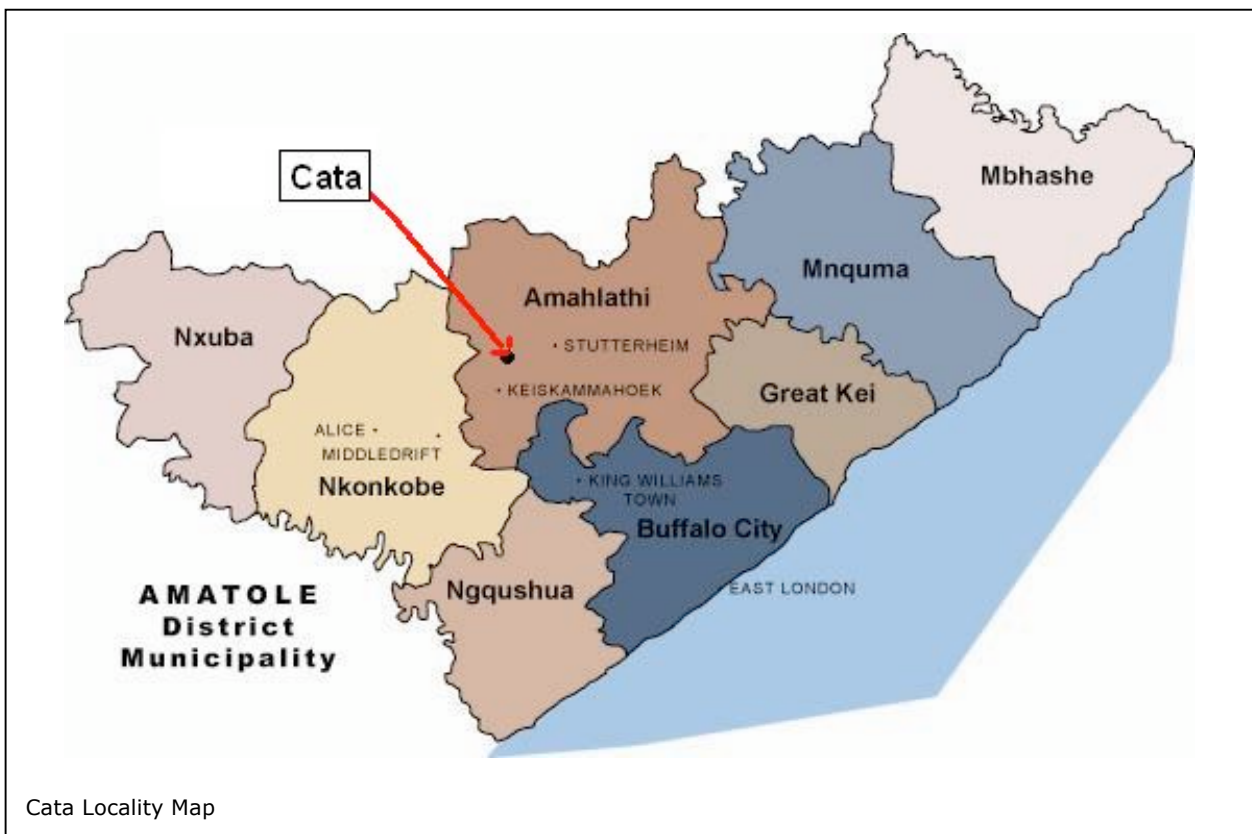
1 Introduction

The village of Cata is located near Keiskammahoek in the Eastern Cape. The village is nestled against the slopes of the Amatole Mountains, which form an important catchment for the whole area. Many streams develop and flow down the slopes of the amphitheatre-like mountains that crowd around the village. These streams meet in the valley to form the Cata River (a major tributary of the Keiskamma River). The name 'Cata', which means "add a little bit", derives from this reality - all the small streams joining together, to form a strong, perennial river. In many respects, the development process at Cata (that is described in this booklet) has drawn inspiration from the geographical and ecological processes at work in this magnificently beautiful part of the country. The Cata Story is about people co-operating with one another and pulling together, about fostering partnerships, about deliberately adopting an integrated approach to development. It's about a small community coming together to achieve something big.

2 Background and Context

2.1 The development orthodoxy in SA

The legacy of apartheid is pervasive poverty, especially in South Africa's former homeland areas. To date, the response of the democratic government to this challenge has been disappointing. More specifically, it has failed to formulate a coherent rural development strategy and programme to tackle poverty. What compounds the problem is that the hegemonic discourse of planning revolves around the identification of, and focus on, spaces deemed to hold strategic value. As the most recent ANC policy document on economics puts it, "In order to overcome the spatial distortions of apartheid, future settlement and economic development opportunities should take place as close as possible to main growth centres". Only welfare expenditure is encouraged outside of so-called growth areas. Invariably, this translates into investment in and around cities, and the bypassing of the former homelands. Not surprisingly, the gap between rich and poor has continued to grow in the post-apartheid period, and the relentless slide of the masses of people living in the former homelands has continued unabated. Ironically, the development choices of the post-apartheid government have reinforced (not undone) the spatial distortions of apartheid.



Cata Locality Map

In this context, it has been impossible for the rural poor to realise the socio-economic claims defined as rights in South Africa's Constitution. The Bill of Rights is nothing more than a paper tiger for the rural poor.

2.2 Poverty in Cata

The socio-economic situation in Cata in 2000/1 was characterized by pervasive, worsening poverty. In early 2000 BRC undertook a household livelihood assessment in the village. The people categorised themselves into four groups: struggling, coping, moderate and well-off. 36% of households were struggling, which meant that they had no dependable source of income. This dire situation is confirmed by comparing the percentage of households with no income in 1996 with that in 2001. Over that five year period, the percentage of households with no income rose from 16% to 43%.

My father passed away while we were still young and my mother struggled to carry on with cultivating the land. As a result, we left the irrigation scheme. The situation became difficult for my family; we struggled to make ends meet. Although many families in the community were struggling, there was a support system through the extended family. However, because things were hard for many in the community, it was not easy to get help from family members – many families struggled to feed themselves.

Zoleka Tontsi

One of the reasons for the increase in poverty was that the amount of economic activity taking place in the village had declined. In 1996, 58 people (ie 3% of the population) were employed; by 2001 only 44 people (ie 2% of the population) had a job. It was also apparent that rising unemployment in the cities had reduced the level of remittance payments being made into the village.

I have lived away from the community of Cata for a long time; I left to go and work in Cape Town as job opportunities around here were limited. I worked there until 1989 when I got retrenched from a company where I worked for twenty years. I was fortunate to land a job with another company but, unfortunately the company went down within three years and I found myself without work again. It is at that point that I decided to return to Cata in 1992.

Zanomzi Ncinane

One of the prerequisites for local economic development is adequate available local skills. Although there had been modest improvements in overall levels of education in Cata since democracy, there were still only just over 100 people who had a matriculation certificate in 2001.

At the turn of the century, civil society in Cata was very weak. There was still a branch of SANCO that existed in the village, but its effectiveness was hamstrung by a lack of resources and facilities. A former headman still loomed large in local politics. Members of the civic and supporters of the former headman gave their allegiance to different political parties. Cata was a divided community.

3 Rights-based development approach – its application in Cata

BRC’s strategic plan defines three prerequisites for the realisation of rights-based development, as follows:

1. Securing resources at village level
2. Realising potentials through integrated planning and implementation
3. Building capacity at local level to take charge of development.

Below we elaborate how BRC has tackled each of these challenges in Cata.

3.1 Securing resources at village level

The Cata Settlement Agreement was signed on 7 October 2000. In terms of the agreement, the monetary value of land rights dispossessed through the implementation of betterment was placed at almost R32 000 per household. It was agreed that half of this money would be paid directly to the families as financial compensation and that the other half would be set aside for local development. That is, approximately R5,2 million was ring-fenced for development. This amount was supplemented by government grants worth about R1,5 million. This money was transferred to the Amatole District Municipality, which assumed administration and management responsibilities. Crucially, the settlement agreement instituted a Project Steering Committee to guide the development process. More specifically, the agreement specified that “the steering committee shall have the decision-making authority and responsibility for the development in respect of the type of development and the funds to be allocated for such development”.

In addition, the Restitution Settlement Agreement gave the Cata community an absolute majority on the Project Steering Committee (PSC). This model provided the basis both for broad-based community participation in the planning and implementation of the development process, as well as the establishment of the CPA as the institutional hub in the village. This model is different from the norm, where communities are merely consulted, but decision-making is left to government structures. The Cata model ensures that government accounts to the people, and that government serves the people.

The main reservation that has been expressed about the Cata funding model is that it is interpreted as the community financing its own development. The flip-side of this interpretation is that government is ‘let off the hook’ as far its constitutional responsibilities for development are concerned. This critique overlooks a number of key aspects and implications of the Cata model. Principally, the critique arises from abstract theorizing; it suffers from a lack of reflection on practical realities and engagement. More specifically, the current framework of government delivery means that the former homeland areas are completely by-passed in favour of so-called strategically-placed urban centres. There is virtually no government-initiated socio-economic development taking place in the former homelands. Instead, economically active people from these areas are encouraged to migrate into the cities, leaving the rural areas depleted of their meagre skills.

The critique also fails to recognise the opportunities that the Cata model offers its beneficiaries. One of these is the brokering of additional public resources. When a community is investing its own resources in its development, it occupies the moral high ground - it is no longer a beggar at the table of government, it is a public-sector investor. The Cata community has used this power dynamic very effectively. Below we tabulate some of the resources that it has brokered into the village to supplement its own investment.

| Category | Project | Organisation | Contributions | Value |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|----------|
| Infrastructure development | Multi-purpose hall (completed in 2003) | Dept. of Labour | Construction training: 43 people 25 – in building skills 6 – in carpentry 6 – in painting and décor 6 – in electrical work | R100 000 |
| | Construction of three classrooms | Dept. of Education/Dept of Public Works | Renovation of other school buildings – security fence, flooring (tiles), ceiling, painting of doors, and windows | R400 000 |
| | Roads (internal) | Amatole District | Transport funding | R200 000 |

In sum, through brokering, the Cata community has doubled the development monies made available through the restitution agreement.

3.2 Realising potentials through integrated planning and implementation

Planning

As 'developer' for the Cata process, ADM adopted a three-phase process, comprising situation analysis, planning and implementation. In order to arrive at an integrated analysis, ADM appointed service providers to cover the following topics and fields of study: environment, engineering, village layout, land survey, agriculture and forestry. BRC was appointed to co-ordinate and manage the development process. All documentation generated through the analysis was tabled for consideration in PSC meetings. At that point, community representation was arranged through an elected community structure called 'the development committee'. In addition, there were a number of consultations in general community meetings.

The Cata situation had been analysed by the end of 2001, enabling integrated planning to commence. One of the issues that the planning team focused on was the formulation of implementation plans. Too often, municipal plans resemble glorified 'wish-lists'; they lack the operational details necessary to enable them to be implemented. This pitfall was avoided in Cata. The processes of project prioritisation and operational planning were undertaken in close consultation with the elected development committee.

One of the most amazing things about this development is the way in which it allowed the people to nominate their leaders. For me this was an expression of the will of the people. The entire consultation process was impressive; it was something to see how the needs of the people were taken into consideration. For the first time I got a good sense of what it means to listen to the people – their concerns and fears were listened to and although the leaders did not have all the answers to the questions raised, there was genuine consultation.

Mzwandile Gatya

By late 2002, although the planning process still had some way to run, there was already clarity and consensus about the priority needs of the community. Some of these needs were of such a nature that they could be addressed in the short-term. Further, the situation in Cata at this time was that there was growing disillusion with the development process, because it seemed to be taking a long time without delivering anything. Therefore, ADM acceded to a request from the development committee that some projects be implemented immediately, without waiting for the finalization of the development plan. The building of a multi-purpose community hall, the construction of three new classrooms at the primary school and the upgrading of internal roads, became known as 'short-term' projects. The first two were implemented in 2003.

The consultation with the community took a long time; there was all the government bureaucracy the process had to go through. Many people did not understand the bureaucracy and the delays this would cause in the process. They became impatient with the delays and started to panic and started to speculate about what could have gone wrong with the process.

Political tensions started to dominate; the leaders were aware that political tensions could divide the people and derail the development. It felt like something needed to happen to assure the people that the intentions for the development were still honourable. A big turnaround came through the construction of the hall; it made people realise that something was happening – trust and hope were restored in the process.

I was amazed by the involvement of the community in the process – as a councillor I could see the importance of this. With the construction of the hall, although expert contractors were brought in from outside, the labour came from the community. I think this helped to instil a sense of ownership within the community – slowly I could see how attitudes were changing. By observing the process as a councillor, I could see a new sense of purpose within the community.

Mzwandile Gatya

In mid-2003, the Cata community and ADM adopted an integrated development plan for the village. This plan covers the following sectors: infrastructure, forestry, agriculture and tourism. In addition, it recommended that the community establish a communal property association (CPA) to take transfer of the communal land and to manage development on the land. In early 2004, the Cata CPA was established; the development committee ceased to exist at that point.

Implementation

Since 2003/4, the Cata Communal Property Association (CPA), the Amatole District Municipality (ADM) and Border Rural Committee (BRC) have focused on implementing the plan. Projects in all sectors have been implemented, meaning that the development process in Cata has a broad scope. In late 2005, the project was visited by a former Acting Director-General of the Province. He indicated that Cata was the most ambitious, wide-ranging rural development process that he was aware of in the Eastern Cape.

Different projects have been implemented through different institutional systems and processes. However, the CPA, ADM and BRC have all promoted a common set of principles, including maximizing local employment, building partnerships and seeking underlying sustainability. Consequently, it is not surprising that about 250 new local jobs have been created through development projects since 2003/4.

Apart from the CPA, ADM and BRC, some of the organisations that have made positive contributions to the Cata process include the following:

Public: Department of Land Affairs (Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights), Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Department of Agriculture, National Development Agency, National Lotteries Board

NGOs: North-South Institute (Austria), Färnebo Folk High School (Sweden), Africa Groups of Sweden, Birdlife-SA, Student Partnership Worldwide

Private: Fractal Forest Africa, Umhlaba-Setplan, Terratest Inc, Jeffares & Green Inc, Bungu Civils, Groundzero, Design Architecture, Tshani Consultants, Maluti GSM

Universities: Fort Hare (Institute for Social and Economic Research), Rhodes (Geology Department)

3.3 Building capacity at local level to take charge of development

In Cata, BRC has remained consistent in its determination to build institutional capacity to drive development locally. Initially this meant working with the development committee and, more recently, with the CPA. These structures are central because they have been entrusted with co-ordinating and managing the integrated development processes locally.

CPAs have been dismissed in most of the literature as a failure. However, this is a premature conclusion because it disregards the fact that most CPAs have been set up without resources or support; they have been set up to fail. No institution – whether it is a company, a trust, an association, whatever – can function effectively without the resources that it requires to fulfil its objectives. In the case of Cata, we have thus focused on resourcing the CPA and offering it support. This has paid dividends. In 2007 the CPA held its third successful AGM. During the past four years it has managed key aspects of the development projects (eg labour recruitment and selection) and it has been responsible for community consultation and communication. Crucially, it has functioned in an open and democratic manner.

The CPA is trying to provide a different kind of leadership; different from a time when we were under the leadership of a headman. I can clearly remember how the headmen exercised their power in a way that marginalised most people. Now, the CPA tries to include most people in the decision-making and we to them.

Nothemba Languva

At the beginning, a development committee was elected to look at all developments in the area. We were informed that we have a development plan that includes all the projects in Cata. As time went on we were advised to elect people for the Communal Property Association (CPA) that would be responsible for overseeing the development. The CPA helps us in managing all the developmental issues and projects in the community.

Initially there were problems around the development; since it was not clear how people were being employed, especially in the wattle project, it raised many suspicions of favouritism. We voiced our dissatisfaction about that, and we were listened to by the committee members. Things started to change, and were done differently – there was more transparency and we were informed of a system that would enable people to register for jobs.

All decisions are taken in the community meetings with all present except for those who are too lazy to attend meetings. I try at all times to be present in the meetings unless I am away from Cata.

Nolungile Kom

The CPA co-ordinates the development process; it does not implement projects. In order to implement projects in a sustainable manner, BRC has facilitated the formation and development of local businesses in the forestry, agriculture and tourism sectors. This is a key challenge because the development process will only be sustainable in the long-term if the projects are run profitably.

BRC has used a number of capacity building methods over the past few years, including training, mentoring and workshopping. Since 2002, 23% of the adult population of Cata has participated in one or other training programme organised by BRC.

Because of this development, people are trained in different skills which they use in the community; I see how these jobs are benefiting the people of Cata. We have acquired skills that we never thought possible; even women have been trained to work in construction. When we built the tanks for the “Water for Food” project, we made use of the skills we acquired through training provided. I was trained in fencing and now I am busy doing fencing for the irrigation scheme in the extended area.

Mongezi Mnqaula

4 Outputs delivered

Through the strategic approach outlined above, BRC has managed to oversee and support the completion of a number of projects outlined in the 2003 IDP. Brief descriptions of these projects follow.

Community centre

The hall was built in 2003. It contains a large hall, three smaller rooms that house a museum, office and crèche respectively, and a kitchen and cloakrooms. The hall has provided a convenient meeting space for the community (previously it had to cram into small classrooms in the high school), and a secure space for the payment of welfare grants (eg pensions, disability, child-support). The office is used both by the CPA as well as project administrators and emerging businesses. The existence of the crèche has freed up considerable time for parents in Cata; this has enabled more adults to become economically active.

I receive my child grant in the community hall; I no longer have to travel to town for that and it is saving me transportation money.

Noludwe Gwikana

Primary school classrooms

Throughout the 1990s, the Cata community urged the Department of Education to build new classrooms at its primary school, to create an environment that is conducive for learning. But the Department was unable to respond to this request. Therefore the community decided to use its own money to build these rooms in 2003. Significantly, it was able to use this decision to leverage supplementary financial resources from the Department, to renovate the already-existing school structures. This work was also completed in 2003.

Wattle plantation

The first economic project to be implemented was the conversion of a seventy-five hectare wattle jungle into a managed plantation. This was implemented in 2004/5 using a local team of twenty people. The plantation was thinned in 2006. The wood will be harvested and sold around 2013, thereby generating money to enable further afforestation.

Water for Food

Because of BRC's commitment to a pro-poor focus, the organisation decided to seek and implement technology that would improve food security in the village. In 2004, the organisation was exposed to a method of channelling and storing water for domestic production known as 'Water for Food'. This method is labour-intensive and based on permaculture principles. There are currently about twenty Cata families that have established and are farming 'water for food' gardens. Those who work consistently harvest about R200's worth of vegetables a month.

Irrigation Scheme

In order for the irrigation scheme to become operational again, it was necessary to repair damaged infrastructure and to build an agricultural team that would implement operations. These preliminary tasks had been undertaken by the end of 2005, enabling implementation to start in 2006. By the middle of 2007, 7 ha of the land had been brought under cultivation. The plan is to create a multi-faceted agricultural business, producing vegetables, fruit and jam, lucerne and fodder, and wheat and bread. The irrigation scheme will fill the 'Food Basket' in Cata and beyond. Already, the business has improved food security in the village.

Through the irrigation development project in the village we are able to produce fresh produce at a reasonable price; this helps with minimizing travelling costs and ensures that most of us have food in our homes.

Mambhele Kom

The irrigation development project is the source of food in this community; through this project most of the people can easily get vegetables in the community rather than having to rely on getting them from town. Also, vegetables from the irrigation development project are much more affordable.

Zanomzi Ncinane

When I look around and see how green Cata is, it makes me happy and proud because our village is producing a lot of vegetables and our lives are changing for the better. A small thing like being able to buy vegetables in our village instead of going to town is one of the big benefits of the development.

Mzama Myama

Museum

The Cata case was the first claim stemming from betterment dispossession to be favourably settled under the restitution programme. As such, it set a precedent for other claims and had significant policy ramifications, some of which are yet to be played out. In short, the Cata case defined an historic watershed; this is why the IDP recommended the establishment of a community museum. The museum was opened in October 2006. On the occasion of the opening, Chief Land Claims Commission Gwanya said: "This museum is an expression of what government is thinking about, but Cata is already doing it." During its first year, over 1000 people visited the museum.

Heritage trail

Whereas the museum provides visitors with 'head knowledge' about betterment, the trail provides a more personalised experience. The trail takes visitors into the erstwhile homesteads of the Mqalo and Tete families. Boards at these sites provide fascinating information about family life before the removal. The focal point of the trail is a toposcope which shows the exact location of the homesteads of all 334 families that were removed through betterment dispossession. The trail is not only about social heritage, it is also about natural heritage and beauty. An information board about the geology of the area provides clues about how the landscape was formed and assumed its amphitheatre-like characteristics. The trail was opened to tourists in 2007.

Additional Ongoing Projects

In addition to the projects that have been implemented, there are others that have commenced. At the time of writing (October 2007), contractors are on site - building chalets and upgrading roads, and the local forestry team is busy planting a new pine plantation. The upgrading has taken more time and budget than anticipated, but there is general community joy that the roads are already in a better state than they've ever been.

I remember a time when the roads were so bad that even small cars couldn't drive smoothly on our roads and when we had funerals, people would have to walk and fetch the coffin from a distance as far as the nearby village as it was very difficult to drive this way.

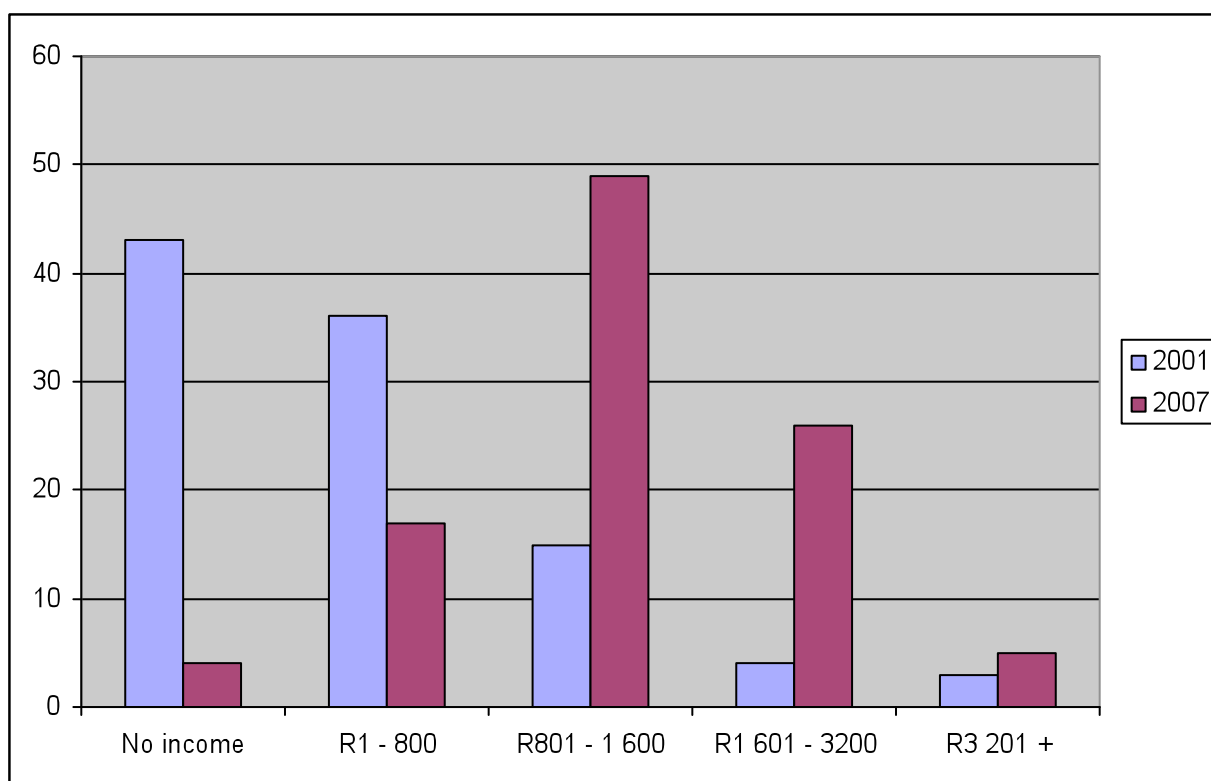
Mambhele Kom

The restitution settlement agreement and the IDP identified forestry as one of the key economic sectors in Cata. The establishment of a 400 ha pine plantation was planned as the flagship forestry project. In 2005, DWAF granted the community the license required to implement the

project. Planting started in December 2006. During the first planting season, the local team planted some 13 000 seedlings over 11 ha.

5 Outcomes achieved – census

In 2004, just after implementation had commenced in earnest, BRC wrote that “it is early days, but one thing is already clear: there is now substantial hope for the people of Cata”. At the time of writing this booklet, there is more than hope; there is significant evidence that the development process has already yielded significant outcomes. More specifically, a recently conducted research process shows that the 1996 – 2001 trend of deepening poverty in Cata has been reversed. A comparison of our 2007 figures with the 2001 census shows that income levels have increased, employment has risen, education levels are improving and there is better food security. These and other outcomes are elaborated on, below.



Bar graph note: Comparative percentages of households falling into defined income brackets in 2001 and 2007

Income

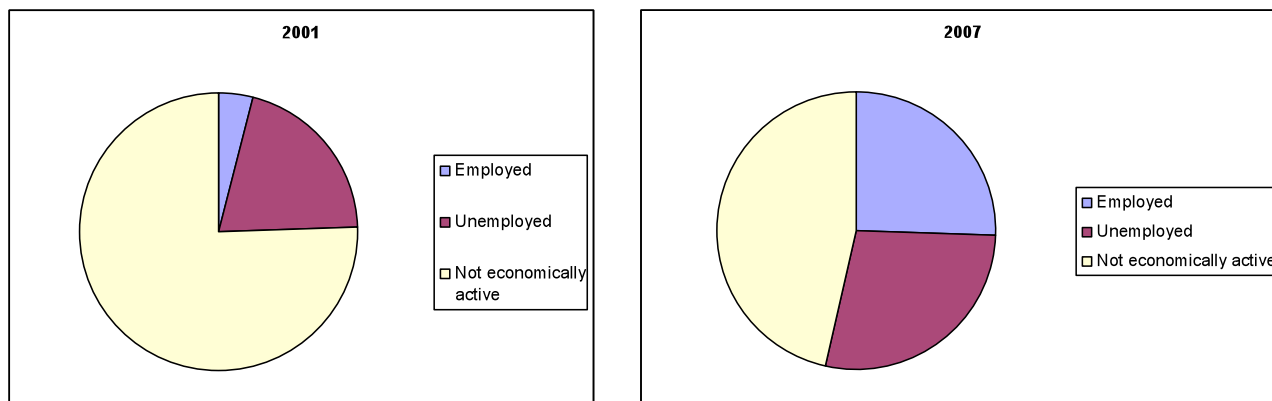
The percentage of households with a monthly income of more than R1 600 has increased from 7% in 2001 to 31% in 2007. The percentage of households with no income at all has dropped from 43% to 4%. . These percentages are significant because they show that the increase in levels of income is a broad-based phenomenon, benefiting most Cata households. In fact, if one consolidates the percentages, there were a total of 79% of households living on R800 or less in 2001, whereas in 2007 80% were living on more than R800. South Africa has not yet defined an official poverty line, so it is not useful to make a definitive claim here about the precise extent to which poverty has been reduced. However, it is clear that the increase in average household income in Cata has far outstripped inflation.

I remain amazed by all the changes I see in the community because of the development; my own life has changed in so many ways. Although I do not qualify for an old age social grant yet, I am happy that I can take care of myself from what I earn!

Nothemba Languva

Employment

One of the main reasons that income levels have increased is that there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of local people that are employed. Employment rates have increased from 4% in 2001 to 26% in 2007. Most of the new jobs have been created in the agriculture, forestry and construction sectors.



Pie graph note: Shifts in the levels of economic activity amongst people between the ages of 15 and 64, from 2001 to 2007.

When I was growing up, very few people from Cata could find employment here at home, most went to the big cities for employment. It is good to see that we can get jobs here at home and are able to stay with our families.

Mongezi Mnqaula

Sources of Income

In most rural areas in the former homelands, over the past few decades, the two most important sources of income have been remittances and (more recently) welfare grants. These two sources of income remain important for the Cata community, with 39% of its income coming from welfare payments and 8% from remittances. However, for the first time in about fifty years, most of the community’s income now stems from economic activity taking place in and around Cata. More specifically, 41% of income derives from locally-generated wages and 10% is generated from local businesses. This means that there is considerable local economic development taking place in the Cata, in the heart of a former homeland. This assertion is confirmed by a closer look at the statistics pertaining to levels of economic activity amongst the 15 – 64 year old age group. In 2001, 4% of this group was employed, 20% was unemployed and 76% was not economically active. That is, 3 out of every 4 people who were in the age group that is supposed to be economically active, were not. They had given up hope, they were despondent. In 2007, the situation was that 26% of the 15 – 64 year old group was employed, 28% was unemployed and 47% was not economically active. Crucially, the percentage of people that is not economically active has dropped from 76% to 47%. So, it is not surprising that the level of unemployment has risen: because many people have secured jobs locally, there is greater optimism about the prospect of getting jobs, so more people are seeking jobs.

Although I am not working yet I am happy; I know that when there will be an opportunity for a job I will be informed by the job desk in the hall. We have hope because now we see the change in Cata - things now are much more real and better than before!

Mzama Myama

Although I haven't got a job yet, I am hopeful because I know my name has been registered on the list of people seeking jobs. I have noticed that I don't see many people loitering on the streets of Cata; people are occupied and in the end they manage to sustain themselves.

Noludwe Gwikana

I see our youth are now working and do not roam around the streets of the village. I think this has somehow helped to reduce the crime in the area. Even some of the old people used to be robbed after getting their social grants; that doesn't happen that often anymore.

Mambhele Kom

Education

The percentage of people that had less education than Grade 7 has dropped from almost 50% in 2001 to 35% in 2007. This is important because a lack of education/ skills is a serious impediment to development. Completing primary school is not necessarily a sufficient educational achievement to enable one to perform effectively in the economy, but it is certainly a necessary achievement.

Because of the large number of mature adults with limited education, BRC has placed emphasis on adult education, through a variety of capacity building processes, including on-the-job-training. Anecdotal evidence, such as feed-back from contractors who have worked in Cata and testimony from training beneficiaries, indicates that these interventions have built the skills-base in the village.

I have observed how my communication skills have improved as well; I have been exposed to relating and interacting with different people irrespective of cultural background, age or race. I still get overwhelmed every time I need to talk about development because it means so much to me. I have a different way of looking at life now because I am able to take the initiative for things that need to be done; for instance if something needs to be done in my work environment I do not wait for others but take responsibility for getting it done. This has enabled me to attend to the complaints from the community without waiting for the committee members. There is hope for the future because with the skills that I am acquiring, I am able to earn a living. I've seen the benefits of this development in my own brother's life, he was trained as a builder and is now self-employed – I can see houses that he has built in our own area.

Khuselwa Tontsi

Energy source

The percentage of households that now uses electricity for cooking has increased from 3% in 2001, to 51% in 2007. This increase is significant in at least two respects. First, it means that people can afford to buy electricity as an energy source (as opposed to using a 'free' source such as wood). Second, it means that there is less pressure on the natural resources in Cata's indigenous forests and the managed wattle plantation, for fire wood. In other words, it is good for environmental sustainability and the viability of the forestry enterprise.

Food security

Almost all households eat regularly; 99% eat twice a day or more often. Almost half of the families eat more regularly than they did three years ago. For BRC, this an important outcome of the development process because it means that the quality of life of the poor has improved considerably. (The rich never suffer from food insecurity; the poor are frequently hungry.) To have arrived at the current situation, where 99% of household have enough to eat, is a strong indicator that poverty in Cata has been significantly reduced.

I can confidently say that my life has changed dramatically in more ways than one; my economic and social situation has changed – even my health has improved. I earned some income from hosting and that enabled me to take care of some of my needs – I no longer had to rely on my mother to provide for me. I have since been able to support my family and help with some of the household expenses. In my own home I see how the vegetables that we are able to buy at an affordable price are good for our health. Our diet at home has improved.

Khuselwa Tontsi

Domestic financial management

51% of households have a bank account; in 59% of these cases, the account is held by a woman. The percentage of households in Cata with a bank account is higher than the national average.

In the community, the development has created opportunities for women – many have become aware of their potential and are starting to do things that they thought were not possible. For some women, the development has created an opportunity for skills development and they are realising the choices they have in life - it is good to see them exercise their choices by undertaking tasks that were previously considered impossible for women. Looking around in the community, I can see how women are slowly becoming economically independent – they have control over the money that they are earning.

Boniswa Tontsi

6 Conclusion – the realisation of an alternative

The Cata Story is uplifting and encouraging because it is an account of how poor, marginalised people are in the process of overcoming tremendous obstacles and challenges; they are pushing back the tide of poverty that threatened to overwhelm them. It appeals to our basic sense of human solidarity, known in South Africa as ubuntu.

The Cata Story challenges the prevailing development paradigm in South Africa, which claims that economic growth can only realistically occur in strategic nodes, and that public investment in rural areas should be limited to welfare hand-outs. The Cata Story asserts a contesting paradigm, which we call rights-based development. This paradigm puts people first, irrespective of where they live. It revolves around the values and principles of decentralised, participatory democracy, redistribution of resources, integrated process, and the building of human capital.