

*Balance between Short Term Relief and Long Term
Empowerment - Social Entrepreneurial Projects: The Men on the Side of the Road
Project*

15 minutes

When I started the MSR project I was an economist in a large company. I saw the people waiting for jobs and wondered who was doing anything about them. I found that the religious groups were providing daily food in the form of short term relief but there was no empowerment happening where these unemployed people who were seeking work actively everyday could move forward and upward. In fact the soup the churches were providing was creating a sense of entitlement and dependency.

So I sat on the Road and I listened the men. They told me they had certain needs in order:

- 1. To get good paying work (not necessarily full time employment, which surprised me)*
- 2. To stop the police harassing them*
- 3. To provide toilets and some structure while they waited for work*

As a project we decided to challenge the police first while at the same time we started a campaign to collect tools for the men in a media campaign.

We received a high court order and since then the unemployed have not been harassed. A short term goal that has had long term effects. Since then we realised that it was not so much about winning the court case but that we had made the issue of day labour public and that all the images on TV and pictures in the paper about unemployment suddenly focused on the image of the guy standing on the side of the road. We had achieved a long term empowerment strategy through short term relief.

All the time we were collecting hand tools and doing a PR job for the project as we knew that the average citizen would one day be picking up the unemployed and giving them jobs. We collected 50 000 tools for the men in a short term PR strategy but we created enough momentum for us to start focusing on the other needs of the men...structure and good paying work.

We failed time and again to build infrastructure for the men as they asked especially toilets. I went to a site in Durban in 2005 where about 100 men had been waiting for jobs. They had urinated completely through the electricity wires over a few years.

The project started receiving quite a bit of funds for training and skills development mostly from corporates. However was this a short term intervention or long term empowerment. In reality once we trained say a bricklayer it was very difficult to get that guy a job as the apprentice system no longer exists. In reality developers want the

job done as quickly as possible and cannot afford bricklayers to make mistakes or to be slow as this means money lost.

Training is undoubtedly important but we have about 300 000 people who wait on the side of the road everyday and nearly all of them need additional training and skills development. This would cost this project R7.5 Billion and yet there is no apprentice program which means it will be difficult for the low skilled to gain experience.

Training is a long term empowerment program that needs huge investment and can only get funded when there is budget for training. The MSR project only trains today when there is funding otherwise we don't train. The DOL and EPWP have not to date offered the MSR program any support in terms of training and skills development.

The project decided to focus on good paying regular work as the numbers of men jumped to 400 000 people in 2007 that looked at both short and long term objectives.

In a stroke of genius Peter Kratz current MSR director started organised sites that included very high visibility areas where the men where waiting for work.

The 20 organised sites we have include a daily presence(6 days a week) at sites with a gazebo, a fieldworker and a placement officer. Sometimes 20 000 cars can pass these organised sites.(That's 400 000 people a day that see the project)

Let me add that there are at least 1000 organised sites measured and 200 viable organised sites in the country but they need to be funded for R120k per annum. We have only managed to fund 20.

MSR registers all the men that wait for jobs and each receive a registration card. The placement manager and the fieldworker on the site get to know each man individually. Once they receive work (and it can be daily, weekly, monthly or permanent) the placement coordinator keeps a track record of work done. This is long term empowerment as most unemployed people have no track record and no references which keeps them unemployed in a vicious cycle.

Even though MSR does provide mostly short term relief in the form of regular jobs, the track record system and visibility that the organised sites provide create long term empowerment.

In 2008 MSR managed 150,000 days labour on a very small budget on 15 sites countrywide. Imagine what this model could do on 200 sites...2000000 days labour in one year.(R24 million, a fraction of the cost of the EPWP program)

Let me add again that DOL, EPWP and most other government departments have not funded this project, which begs the question why?

From the DOL they are not in favour of casualisation because of the lack of UIF and WC.

The DOL/SETAS offer opportunities mostly to employed people.

*The DOL/National skills Fund will train but needs guarantees of a job
The EPWP criteria is mostly about women, youth and disable and not men.
In terms of the unemployed men on the side of the road government is not looking at
either short term relief programs or long term empowerment initiatives and don't
seem to want to!*

*In conclusion the MSR project has had many short term wins and this has built into
long term empowerment thinking. The reality is that the numbers of unemployed are
growing and people need to eat. This means that providing a daily job through the
MSR program is in my opinion better than providing soup as the job leads to a track
record which leads to long term empowerment.*