

Botswana's South East District Youth Empowerment League:

Engaging Youth through Municipal Partnership and Collaboration



This case study explores the results and lessons learned from an innovative partnership between the City of Toronto and South East District, Botswana, supported through FCM's Municipal Partnership Program. The partnership helped build the capacity of South East District Council to address HIV/AIDS issues, through an HIV/AIDS prevention program engaging youth.

OVERVIEW

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is the national voice of municipal government in Canada. With more than 1,900 members, FCM represents the interests of municipalities on policy and program matters that fall within federal jurisdiction. Members include Canada's largest cities, small urban and rural communities, and 18 provincial and territorial municipal associations.

Adapting Canadian municipal expertise in developing countries through cooperation activities is a powerful tool for development. FCM draws on the strength of its municipal network to implement municipal capacity building programs in over 20 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, with support mainly from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Through peer-to-peer exchange, Canadian municipalities share their expertise and practical experience with their overseas counterparts, contributing to staff training and improved municipal service delivery, governance and management. More than 200 Canadian municipalities and municipal associations, and 1,500 Canadian municipal experts have participated in FCM's international program since its inception in 1987.

Over the years, FCM has developed a body of knowledge on innovative management practices and methods of transferring knowledge in a number of thematic areas. This case study explores the results and lessons learned from an innovative partnership between the City of Toronto and South East District, Botswana, which has helped build the capacity of South East District Council to address HIV/AIDS issues, through an HIV/AIDS prevention program engaging youth.

Section 1: Introduction

The HIV/AIDS prevention and capacity building partnership between the City of Toronto and South East District Council (SEDC), Botswana was first established in 2002 and has been active for over 7 years. The goal is to increase SEDC capacity to address HIV/AIDS issues. The partnership initially focused on both Palliative Care and Support and Youth Engagement. Currently the major focus is on Youth Engagement, the subject of this case study.



The Kicking AIDS Out approach focuses on incorporating HIV/AIDS prevention into sports-based programming for youth.

Youth engagement in SEDC has been achieved through establishing the South East District Youth Empowerment League (SEDYEL) that applies a Kicking AIDS Out (KAO) approach. KAO is an international network of organizations that train peer educators to incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention into sports based programming for youth.

Engaging youth and integrating gender equity, is key to effective local governance and HIV/AIDS prevention. At the partnership's in-

ception, there was no organized sport infrastructure for youth in the district and youth were not being effectively engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention. Now through the support and collaboration of numerous partners internationally, regionally and locally, SEDYEL manages 100 football teams, 27 of which are girls' teams, with 2000 participants.



Girls from one of the 27 girls' football teams that SEDYEL manages.

SEDYEL operates through three streams: 1) Sport; 2) Peer Education; and 3) Girls Safe Spaces. SEDYEL has a project director and each stream has a paid coordinator supported by zonal outreach volunteers in each of the five villages in the district. SEDC provides ongoing mentoring and support in the form of office space, transportation and communications. SEDC also acquired land to develop a youth centre for SEDYEL. The City of Toronto, through a grant to Schools Without Borders, provided resources for a building and SEDC provided additional in-kind support in the form of labour and materials.

A striking feature of the partnership is the collaboration between SEDC and its youth. SEDYEL has been created with a commitment to building grassroots youth leadership capacity and skills to address HIV/AIDS in collaboration with local government. This has been facilitated through a "south-south" capacity building and skills transfer between SEDYEL and Mathare Youth Sport Association (MYSA), Kenya. SEDYEL has applied MYSA's experience in building youth-led teams while creating safe spaces for health education, HIV/AIDS prevention and gender equity. SEDYEL is seen nationally as a best practice and there is growing recognition for its work internationally.

Section 2: Issue and Approach

HIV/AIDS Capacity Building in South East District

The partnership between the City of Toronto and SEDC was established in 2002 after Stephen Lewis, the UN Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS, made a plea to Canadians to take up the HIV/AIDS challenge in Africa. FCM approached the City of Toronto to take the lead in establishing a partnership with a municipality in Botswana which had one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world. With a population of 1.7 million, everyone in Botswana is either infected or affected by the pandemic. The levels of HIV/AIDS infection in youth are very high, with rates in young women often 3 to 6 times the rates for young men. In light of this vulnerability, effective involvement of youth in HIV/AIDS prevention programming is essential. The first step of the partnership was to work with the Botswana As-

sociation of Local Authorities (BALA) to select a partner, SEDC, and together identify priority areas for skills exchange and targeted training. Youth Engagement and Palliative Care and Support were selected as the key focus areas, with gender and stigma as cross-cutting themes.

Establishing SEDYEL became the municipal partnership's focus for youth engagement. This proved to be a complex undertaking since in Botswana, national government has formal jurisdiction over youth programs. SEDC demonstrated considerable leadership and creativity in establishing SEDYEL and there is growing recognition of this work at the national level. SEDYEL's objectives are:

- 1) To facilitate youth HIV/AIDS prevention in South East District (SED);
- 2) To create real opportunities for male and female youth to be involved in their own development while working towards change (systemic, policy or community cohesion);
- 3) To build individual resilience, self confidence, community connections and critical analysis;
- 4) To increase youth understanding of social and political systems and structures;
- 5) To develop facilitation and practical skills (e.g. report writing, financial management, proposal development); and
- 6) To create safe spaces for young women to realize their potential.



Girls from the Kgatelopele catering project, which is part of SEDYEL's Girls Safe Spaces Project. Kgatelopele caters for large and small events, including the SEDYEL football tournaments and SEDC meetings. (Kgatelopele means "Success" in Setswana.)

Partnership Approach: Youth Engagement in a Municipal Government Context:

In approaching youth engagement, the partners moved away from focusing on youth as a social problem and instead framed youth as integral resources in the community. This strategy represents a shift away from traditional problem-based interventions typical of many sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention efforts targeted to youth. This "for youth by youth" approach has established positive and inclusive youth based programming to address HIV/AIDS prevention priorities in the district. The local government has been the key sponsor and partner in this initiative and has been instrumental in ensuring strong community uptake and support for the program. It is essential for SEDC to continue to support SEDYEL's growth and development to facilitate the program's sustainability.

Establishing SEDYEL within a municipal government context has required everyone to "think outside the box". In this case, it meant applying a participatory program design approach that prioritizes the knowledge of program participants (youth) in the knowledge production and program development process. Priority has been given to locally grounded and culturally appropriate processes in an effort to better design an intervention for the youth of SED that will have a more relevant and long lasting impact. The City of Toronto, together with Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC, see box) and MYSA partners, worked with SEDYEL leaders and the SEDC partnership coordinator to critically reflect on issues and challenges and jointly determine strategies for action. City of Toronto staff provided active support in the form of strategic planning, facilitating critical thinking and analysis, project management mentoring and the integration of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into program design. City of Toronto also shared appropriate health promotion frameworks and tools with the SEDC partnership coordinator and SEDYEL leaders throughout the project.

Commonwealth Games Canada – International Development Through Sport

Commonwealth Games Canada believes in the power of sport as a catalyst for positive change and development. Since 1993, CGC's International Development through Sport (IDS) unit has been supporting programs and partners in southern Africa and the Caribbean to deliver "development through sport" programming and use the convening and transformative power of sport as the vehicle to address pressing social and community development needs. For more information, see: www.commonwealthgames.ca/IDS/.

“SEDYEL is an example of what can happen (between a) Municipal council and (a) community partner. (It is) a powerful testimony of the power of collaboration and partnership where each participant is respected for who they are and their contributions, whether small or big, are recognized and appreciated. In fact, this is what municipal councils should do; provide services and empower communities to be involved as equal partners and not spectators or beneficiaries, but partakers.”

– James George Nange Otieno,
MYESA leader and youth sports trainer

This “bottom-up” approach has enriched the development of SEDYEL. As a central focus of the project, the participatory program design has involved youth leaders visiting Kgotlas¹, creating youth zonal committees, establishing referee and coaching committees and a dedicated girls’ forum. These structures and community processes have generated substantial buy-in and have motivated youth to feel a sense of ownership that is critical to growing and sustaining the program. In addition, SEDYEL participants and SEDC staff have learned to work more collaboratively to address the needs of youth in the district. SEDYEL leaders have had to learn to work within established local government procedures and requirements, to strategically position their needs and to match those to available supports. They have been required to provide regular reports to the SEDC management team. On numerous occasions, SEDYEL leaders have presented their vision, challenges and accomplishments to people in positions of power at local, national and international levels on numerous occasions.

Similarly, SEDC has had to recognize the importance of enabling the establishment of youth governance structures for SEDYEL that locate youth at the centre of planning and decision-making. They have witnessed over 2000 of their district’s youth becoming engaged in the project

“This partnership has changed me a lot in terms of communication relationships. We as the council are able to work together with the youth and that is something rare in this country. I feel fulfilled as an individual for doing something that can add up to the development of this country.”

– Bontle Mmokele, Council Secretary

Collaborative Partnerships and South-South Skills Transfer:

From the beginning, the partnership has focused on leveraging additional resources by bringing in other strategic partners. While FCM partnerships support capacity building through skills and information exchange, there is no dedicated project or operational funding attached to projects. Given that an HIV/AIDS prevention partnership is wide in scope and affects all local government departments and the entire community, an effective partnership could not be achieved through the resources of the City of Toronto and SEDC alone. The City of Toronto’s involvement with a municipality in Botswana pro-



SEDC van transports youth to football tournaments.

vided a vehicle for other organizations to become involved.

Toronto actively sought and facilitated partnerships with organizations in Canada and Europe (i.e. “the north”) as well as those in Africa. It established the partnership with CGC, which was interested in working with the City of Toronto-SEDC partnership particularly because the involvement of both municipalities ensured that strategic and practical supports were in place on the ground. CGC in turn brought in UK Sport and Kicking Aids Out (KAO – see box) and its network of various member organizations, such as Sports Coaches Outreach (SCORE) and Physically Active Youth (PAY) Namibia.

In addition, Toronto established a Global AIDS Fund as a legacy to hosting the International AIDS Conference in 2006. The Fund has been allocated to Schools Without Borders (SWB). This funding enabled them to become a strategic partner in building youth leadership capacity and facilitating the girl’s Safe Spaces and youth exchange programs in Botswana and Kenya. SEDYEL also developed a partnership with the Norwegian Olympic Federation (NIF).

SEDYEL partners recognized the importance of applying existing African knowledge and experience early on in the project. SEDC and MYSA Kenya established a partnership to enable this “south-south” capacity building and skills transfer. Two senior MYSA trainers (George Nange and Jacquelian Wanyonyi) were based in Botswana for several years to help establish SEDYEL and build skills among recruited youth leaders. SEDYEL has applied MYSA’s experience in building youth-led teams while creating safe spaces for HIV/AIDS prevention and health education.

¹ Traditional community meeting place

What is Kicking AIDS Out?

Kicking AIDS Out offers an innovative, inclusive, high energy approach that links sports, physical activity and traditional movement games with HIV and AIDS prevention and education. Kicking AIDS Out began as an African initiative aimed at children and youth. Kicking AIDS Out has developed into an evolving international network of 'southern' and 'northern' partner and member organizations and associates. Trained youth leaders who can engage their peers in sports, provide accurate health-related information and skillfully create safe spaces for discussion on many sensitive issues are essential factors in the initiative's success. For more information see: www.kickingaidsout.net.



SEDYEL provides an effective youth engagement model for SEDC with youth as primary stakeholders in program planning, design and implementation. This youth engagement model has been inspired by MYSA but has been adapted to a partnership that operates within the context of local government. This required on-going deliberations between City of Toronto and SEDC to establish and adapt communications mechanisms, processes and procedures to better engage the youth in SED. This is a first for Botswana – a youth-led initiative supported by local government that emphasizes girls' participation in all aspects of project organization including peer outreach, coaching and refereeing.

“The council has benefited immensely because it is the only council in Botswana with this kind of project, therefore the community at large has benefited a lot because of (youth) outreach focusing on abuse, HIV/AIDS and drugs.”

– Bontle Mmokele, South East District Council Secretary

The “south-south” collaboration within the context of a “north-south” municipal partnership has proved to be very effective. In addition, the lessons learned from SEDYEL have resulted in a “south-north” skills transfer where youth leaders from Africa came to Toronto to train local youth leaders and public health practitioners in applying the KAO approach in the Toronto context.

Section 3: Partnership Results

Benefits of SEYDEL for the South East District, Botswana

SEDYEL has many accomplishments. The program now manages 100 soccer teams, 27 of which are girls' teams. Prior to SEDYEL, there was no formal sport or youth engagement infrastructure in place in SED and no opportunities for female players to participate in football. There are now over 2000 children and youth from all five villages in the district, engaged in sport and HIV/AIDS prevention education through games, discussion and physical activity. In addition, approximately 30 youth leaders, more than half of whom are women, are actively involved in facilitating HIV/AIDS education and prevention work in their community.

“Young people have a safe space to stay together and also (a) sporting chance. It (sport) has never been organized (and) it is evident that the youth have been wanting this opportunity. Moreover, youth have been afforded a chance to learn about issues that affect them.”

– Kitso Masi, SEDYEL Program Director



School outreach at Ramotswa Secondary School focuses on HIV/AIDS education.

Both female and male leaders in SEDYEL have begun to develop self-confidence and skills in organizing, outreach, HIV/AIDS prevention and public speaking. Being engaged in something that is both intellectually and physically challenging has already made a difference in many participants' lives.

“I have learned about youth leadership. Since the formation of this project, I have seen youth taking the lead in terms of changing youth behaviour in issues of HIV/AIDS”.

– Moca Malatsi, SEDYEL Zonal Supporter

Many SEDYEL participants are now comfortable using information technology. They have been very willing to support and train SEDC staff in this regard. In turn, a number of SEDC staff have played mentoring and support roles to SEDYEL and have an investment and passion to see it succeed.



Kitso Masi was once a local gang member but is now the SEDYEL Program Director and a role model for South East District youth.

While crime prevention was never identified as a specific goal of the partnership, anecdotal evidence suggests a reduction in gang violence in the district, attributed to the establishment of SEDYEL. In fact a number of former youth gang members are now active SEDYEL leaders and participants. For example, Kitso Masi was once a local gang member but is now the SEDYEL Program Director and a role model for SED youth. This is very significant in a country with very high HIV/AIDS prevalence, poverty and youth unemployment. SEDYEL now extends across the entire district and the program has given a face to the partnership in every village in South East District.

“It (SEDYEL) has managed to end gangsterism in Ramotswa as those who were leaders in gangs are now leaders in the respective teams, for example, one of our zonal supporters is a former gangster but now he is a leader in Ramotswa.”

– Kebafilwe Moikabinyana, SEDYEL Sport Coordinator

SEDYEL football tournaments have become high profile community events with entertainment, recreation and income generation opportunities (e.g. selling refreshments) and are well attended by community members. SEDYEL has provided real opportunities for youth to be involved in their own development while working toward change for themselves and their community. SEDYEL has strong, transparent and accountable governance structures in place (youth director and coordinators, program leaders, zonal outreach volunteers and committees) and is on the way to becoming a fully youth-run organization with the support of SEDC.



SEDYEL football tournaments have become high profile and well-attended community events in South East District.

SEDYEL leaders have developed an increased understanding of local government and organizational systems and structures. They have also acquired basic facilitation, report writing, project management and public speaking skills. SEDYEL participants report feeling more connected to their community and to their local government. At the

personal level, youth have begun to develop self-confidence, resilience and leadership skills.

“(SEDYEL has facilitated) the sharing of information between youth and the council staff. I can (now) ask for information from the doctor in the department of health within the council.”

– Sharon Matlhaku, SEDYEL Mentor

SEDC’s leadership in the development of SEDYEL is beginning to be recognized nationally and internationally. A wide range of SEDC staff are now involved with SEDYEL, including senior managers, councillors, the District Health Team and SEDC Facilities, Parks and Accounting staff.

“To be involved in this partnership builds responsibility for both the youth and the council employees”

– Mr Masole, SEDC Employee: Accountant

While the impact of using sport to create safe spaces for young women to realize their potential is limited to testimonials, SEDYEL’s Safe Spaces Program (called Kgatelopele – “Success”) hopes to demonstrate impact in the next few years. However, female youth leaders already note positive change as evidenced by the following quote:

“This program has changed my life and helped me a lot. I now feel confident enough to offer advice and support to other young girls who go through the same experience that I went through. I am so happy because if it was not because of this program, I could be lost, but now I am busy helping youth in my village.”

– Kebabonye Malatsi, 22 years, female (Zonal Supporter)

Through funding from the City of Toronto and considerable in-kind support from SEDC, SEDYEL now has a building of its own. This youth centre provides a safe and comfortable meeting and office space. While it is owned by the municipality, it is dedicated to SEDYEL for future development such as an internet café, football field, community garden, multi-purpose sports facility, swimming pool and a children’s playground. Some SEDYEL facilities could also be made available for community use in the future.

“The youth centre will give young people an opportunity to learn from each other about pertinent issues around HIV/AIDS. They learn better from their peers because they are at an age where they don't listen to adults that much.”

– Matshediso Fologang, SEDC Council Chairman

International and national recognition of SEDYEL is growing. For example, SEDYEL was an early entry finalist in the Ashoka Foundation/Nike Changemakers project for youth development through sport and performance art. The British Council, Norwegian Olympic Federation (through KAO), the UK based Coaching for Hope and other organizations have also provided collaborative support and training. In November 2008, SEDYEL was awarded the Botswana National Youth Service Sport and Recreation Award.



Councillor Kyle Rae, City of Toronto, and Bontle Mmokele, South East District Council Secretary at the opening of the SEDYEL Youth Centre.

“Toronto’s compassion, caring and generosity have built a foundation of hope for the future. When you see young people playing soccer and engaging youth in every village in HIV/AIDS prevention, you realize what an important contribution Toronto is making in Botswana.”

– Councillor Kyle Rae, City of Toronto

Section 4: Lessons Learned and Replicability of the Experience

Lessons learned through this municipal partnership centre around the importance of facilitating collaborative partnerships that build and support effective strategies for youth engagement.

In the beginning, building trust and cultural understanding between the City of Toronto and SEDC, while jointly initiating ideas and priority projects was imperative to establishing a good working relationship. While project funding is outside the scope of FCM technical exchanges, it became clear to partners on both sides that once the partnership was established, the ability to implement real change on the ground would be limited without financial resources. Only so much can be achieved through technical exchanges on an annual basis. The success of this partnership is very much attributable to collaboration between many partners in both the north and south, such as CGC, UK Sport and MYSA, who were able to provide both project funding and on the ground mentoring and support. The in-kind and financial contribution of SEDC was essential to the project’s success.

To be successful, strategies for youth engagement must move away from traditional problem-based interventions to ones that facilitate youth ownership and leadership development. This requires creating opportunities for meaningful youth participation in all aspects of project planning, management and evaluation. The City of Toronto has been developing this approach to working with its youth population in collaboration with community partners over the past few years.

They have established a youth cabinet that represents a youth voice to city council and city programs and services for youth are increasingly incorporating this philosophy. This youth-led, adult supported approach more effectively meets the needs of youth and builds on both youth and local government strengths and competencies. In SEDC, such a “for youth by youth” approach effectively engaged the district’s youth in sports-based HIV/AIDS prevention activities.

While there have been many accomplishments through this municipal partnership, certain challenges remain. Accessing long-term funding to support the sustained growth and development of SEDYEL has been challenging, with many partners only committing short term funding. The future of SEDYEL depends on bringing in new partners and securing the continued commitment of existing funders and capacity building mentors in Botswana and internationally. In addition, SEDYEL needs support to develop more capacity in participatory evaluation techniques that can quantitatively and qualitatively demonstrate their impact on youth and the community.

Replicating SEDYEL in its exact form is likely not feasible given the number of different partners involved and resources invested to develop the project. However, the youth engagement approach and mobilization of collaborative partnerships could be replicated in other jurisdictions. In addition, BALA is interested in working with SEDC to replicate SEDYEL in other local government jurisdictions in Botswana.

“This partnership has given the council an exposure to other councils on how to work with the youth.”

– Mr Masole, SEDC Accountant

Key elements to consider include:

- 1) Municipal partners and youth to jointly determine priorities.
- 2) Consistent and committed project coordinators are critical for project development and continuity.
- 3) Identify and bring in strategic partners to leverage long-term funding and facilitate capacity building.
- 4) Identify and engage appropriate regional partners for knowledge and skills transfer.
- 5) Involve youth from the beginning and at all stages of project development and implementation.
- 6) Local government must recognize the importance of enabling youth-led governance structures.
- 7) Intentional and regular critical reflection and participatory evaluation is essential.
- 8) Local government and youth must be committed to effective communication and flexibility in project processes and management.

Note: *This case study was prepared by Barbara Emanuel, Senior Policy Advisor, Toronto Public Health and Seodhna Keown, who was instrumental in establishing SEDYEL as former Africa Programs Officer for Commonwealth Games Canada, based in Namibia for five years. The case study was done in collaboration with SEDYEL and SEDC partners.*

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