



THE BORDER KEI DEVELOPMENT FORUM

A Description and Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The current reform era has generated numerous regional level negotiating forums in South Africa over the last two years. Such forums have variously sought to promote regional peace, resolve local level disputes and promote development initiatives. One such organisation is the Border Kei Development Forum (BKDF), which has been established in the Border-Ciskei-Transkei region. The forum's members include representatives from the 'independent states' and urban, regional, political and government structures in the region. Despite the reality of Homeland separation, the current recession and uncertainty over the region's future, leaders from *all* major community, business and labour groups in that region have united in an attempt to seek a common solution to the desperate plight facing the nation's poorest sub-region/region. Whilst it is still early days for the Forum and it lacks the economic muscle to implement policy, its legitimacy is widely accepted in national and regional circles.

This paper seeks to outline the history and structure of the organisation before presenting a brief assessment of what has been achieved and the organisation's potential.

BACKGROUND TO THE BKDF

In common with similar international development forums the catalyst behind the BKDF was the tremendous resolve displayed by politicians, businessmen and the authorities. They were prepared to put their differences behind them and strive for common solutions to the severe economic crisis which the region is experiencing. This grim reality is supported by economic indicators for the Border-Kei region which reveal that unemployment levels and growth indicators are the lowest in the country (Te Braake 1992). According to BKDF documentation (BKDF 1992a:7), 'the misery and hardship faced by Blacks in the urban and rural areas in the Border-Kei region impelled the Governments of South Africa, Ciskei and Transkei, a number of political groupings, labour groupings, business

groupings and non-governmental organisations to form a body called the Border-Kei Development Forum'. A precursor to the establishment of the BKDF was the formation of the Border Business Action Committee (BBAC), a joint employer body established to co-ordinate the interests of employer groups in the Border-Ciskei-Transkei region in 1991 (BBAC 1991a). One of the primary goals of this organisation has been to 'identify problems frustrating development in the Border region and to take appropriate action to overcome such problems ... [and] to co-operate with other regional and national organisations' (BBAC 1991b:1). This led BBAC to jointly organise the 'Border Peace Conference' in July 1991 in co-operation with the ANC. (African National Congress), SACP (South African Communist Party) and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). At this meeting the combined organisations agreed that in the light of the region's deteriorating social and economic situation, an immediate programme of action was necessary to relieve the situation (BBAC 1991a).

The next major step came in January 1992 when the signatories of the Peace Accord in the region agreed to establish the Border Development Committee. This was undertaken in terms of Section 5 of the Accord which made provision for socio-economic development initiatives. As not all key role players in the region were signatories to the Accord it was realised that, in the interests of the region, an organisation separate from the Peace Accord was needed. This allowed all representative bodies, including the Transkei government and the PAC (Pan-African Congress), to participate (Spring 1993, pers. com.; Hendricks 1993, pers. com.). The result was the formalisation of the BKDF in May 1992 (BKDF 1992a).

BROAD AIMS OF THE BKDF

The principal development objective of the BKDF is 'to prepare an integrated development strategy for the Border Kei region and its constituent sub-regions in order to address the economic development of the region, and in particular the needs of the deprived communities and less developed areas. To achieve the above through the planning and development process which can give effect to both strategy and operational issues' (BKDF 1992a:7).

Specific objectives and principles include:

- the development of an integrated development strategy for the region and appropriate sectoral and sub-regional strategies;
- the formulation of strategies to alleviate poverty and to ensure that the benefits of development reach the disadvantaged;
- the addressing of employment maintenance and creation;
- the identification of relevant policy instruments;
- the encouragement of the participation of as broad a spectrum of community, private and public sector and institutional structures as is possible;

- the identification of the appropriate means and structures to strengthen the area's economic base;
- allowing for meaningful participation by all people and the empowerment of marginalised communities;
- the addressing of appropriate inter- and intra-regional issues;
- the achievement of broad consensus in all matters (BKDF 1992b:10-11)

PARTICIPATORY ORGANISATIONS

More than 42 organisations in the Border-Kei region have participated in the Forum. The most important member groups are:

- the Ciskei government
- the South African government
- the Transkei government
- the African National Congress
- the Congress of South African Trade Unions
- the Democratic Party
- the National Party
- the Pan-African Congress
- the South African Communist Party
- the South African National Civics Organisation
- the Border Business Action Committee
- the Border Regional Development Association
- the Border Services Organisation Forum
- the Regional Development Advisory Committee
- the Regional Liaison Committee
- the Development Bank of Southern Africa
- the Transkei Development Corporation
- the Ciskei People's Development Bank
- the East London City Council
- the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (BKDF 1992b:3).

Given the range of organisations listed above it is apparent that the BKDF enjoys widespread legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of the region's people.

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND APPLIED STRATEGIES

There are four primary structures in the BKDF:

1. The Forum itself in which all member organisations participate;
2. The Executive Committee which co-ordinates the Forum's activities and oversees the implementation of its decisions;

3. The Directorate (based in East London) which consists of a full time staff which undertakes strategic planning and co-ordinates the activities of
4. The four Working Groups which are charged to develop appropriate strategies and policies and the means to achieve them (BKDF 1992b).

The focus of each of the four working groups reflects the broad sectors which the BKDF has identified as being crucial to the region's development:

- Economic Development
- Urbanisation Development
- Human Resource Development
- Rural Development

The various working groups are currently drafting development proposals for the region. It is apparent that they have identified the importance of focusing attention on rural development issues, the provision of housing and infrastructure, the correction of educational inadequacies and the search for realistic economic development strategies.

Critical to the success of the BKDF has been the financial and logistical support afforded the organisation by various institutions which have funded the planning process and assisted in supporting the full-time directorate. These organisations include amongst others the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the Transkei Development Corporation, private Banks and Mercedes Benz. In December 1992, through the support of the latter organisation, the basis for an Institute for Strategic Human Resource Development was laid (BKDF 1992a). The objective of the institute is to develop human resource capacity within the ambit of the third working group. External assistance and support has been important and will continue to be so since the BKDF is essentially a meso-level, co-ordinating structure which is reliant on outside funding.

In addition to setting up the working groups, which are drawing up specific sectoral strategies, the BKDF has also presented a development proposal to the Minister of Finance entitled, *A New Deal for the Border-Kei Region* (BKDF 1992a). In that document high-priority development targets, falling within the ambit of the four working groups, were identified and the financial assistance of the state requested. The document was well received by the government and although no short-term funds were made available, easier access to government structures has been facilitated (*Daily Dispatch*, 11 May 1993). The prospect of increased funding from the Development Bank of Southern Africa exists.

REASONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE BKDF

Although the BKDF has, as of yet, produced few tangible results, it is an example of how joint development guidelines can be formulated by interest groups in a region. In the event of the borders of the development regions being redrawn,

the BKDF could play a prominent role in a future regional government. In addition, as international experience suggests, a meso-level structure such as the BKDF is better equipped than a national government to identify, respond to and address regional needs (Stöhr 1990).

The establishment of the BKDF and its apparent success may be accounted for by the following:

- The current economic, political and social crisis in the region is so severe that regional role players have realised that solutions cannot be postponed and that differences have to be overcome if there is to be any future for the region.
- There are dynamic and resourceful leaders in the region who have had the vision to look beyond the bounds of the policies of their particular organisations (Hendricks 1993; pers. com.).
- Petty political disputes have been temporarily sidelined, a process aided by the region having had a more 'liberal' background than many others in South Africa.
- There is clearly a sense of a common regional identity. The artificial homeland borders have been a hindrance to the region's economy but they have not altered its fundamental economic unity.
- The support and encouragement of institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa needs to be acknowledged. The fact that national organisations have allowed local actors to participate is noteworthy. The easing of government constraints has also allowed the region's people to operate in a less restricted environment.

THE VIABILITY OF THE BKDF

Whilst the BKDF might be a broad based organisation enjoying support and political endorsement from a vast array of organisations, the long-term sustainability of the Forum depends on certain key factors.

- The urgent need to re-incorporate the homelands and clarify the country's new regional borders.
- The need to rationalise the multiple, often conflicting authorities which exercise control in the region.
- If BKDF strategies are to be successfully applied, they must form the basis of a regional programme to be instituted by a future regional government/ authority which has access to public funds.
- The lack of statutory legitimacy and access to significant funding to implement programmes is probably the major constraint to the activities of the BKDF at present.
- In the short term the BKDF needs the continued support of its present donors and efforts need to be made to implement its strategies as soon as possible.

In terms of the potential of the BKDF to serve as a model, it is blatantly apparent that in economically weak, strife torn South Africa, the BKDF is one of the very few successful examples of true regional co-operation by all key role players. Although there are unique conditions which prevail in each area which would make replication difficult, there are valuable lessons to be learnt. Even though the economic viability of such structures is dubious, one needs to remember that:

- Investor confidence will be affected by the ability of a region to present a unified, co-ordinated image and to market the area as one in which business, labour and political groups operate in a co-ordinated fashion.
- Given that there will be some form of regional government in South Africa in the future, organisations such as the BKDF will inevitably have a role to play. Joint structures are a means of possibly ensuring that the 'people on the ground' will have a significant and meaningful say in what happens in their region.
- Given the current strife in the country, the ideals which organisations such as the BKDF aspire to, and the sense of joint purpose practised within it, provide a vision of hope for the future.

Now is the time to plan for the future and if the country is to experience development and growth, local leaders and key figures must bury their differences and strive for a common future as both the national level negotiators and the BKDF have done.

CONCLUSION

Whilst the BKDF might not be a perfect model for other regions, it illustrates the goodwill and co-operation which can still be generated, even in one of the country's most strife torn areas. In addition, it shows that appropriate development strategies can be discussed and formulated in spite of the constraints of Homeland politics and political discord. Although the BKDF might not achieve all its ideals it remains positive by symbolic of change and hope.

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