

## **Rietspruit: Planning for post-closure sustainability**

An integrated plan for community self-reliance is helping local people develop alternative economic opportunities following closure of Rietspruit Mining Services' operations in May 2002.

The plan was developed in partnership between RMS (part of BHP Billiton's Ingwe Coal Group), the community-based Rietspruit Community Development Forum, and the NGO Sustainable Villages Africa (SVA). The plan is based on a comprehensive assessment of local resources, skills, and capacities.

The plan envisages two phases: (a) quick-win projects designed to secure community participation and assist with the immediate loss of incomes locally and (b) a number of medium- and long-term projects.

The quick-win projects include initiatives in areas such as home gardens, hydroponics, meat processing, smallscale farming, textiles, and basket manufacture. There are also opportunities to outsource a number of municipal services, such as blocked drains, to community members. These projects largely draw on existing skills within the community, both those acquired in the mines and indigenous skills. Where gaps are identified (for example, in business, personal finance, and technical skills) SVA uses the experiential method of teaching to transfer skills to community members.

These quick-win projects have achieved their aim of generating community participation and livelihoods. They are likely to be sustainable in the long-term and provide much of the skills and experience needed for the bigger projects envisaged by the Development Forum. Profits from the projects are being put into a fund for further job creation and project development which is under the control of a trust representing the community, the company, the local council, SVA, and other stakeholders.

The last phase of the project is now under way, and five large projects (R1 million and more) will begin as soon as funding has been secured. These will provide 200 jobs in the formal sector, estimated monthly revenues for the community of R200,000, and opportunities to develop more sophisticated skills in financial management, business management and marketing.

Lessons learned include:

- Comprehensive knowledge of resources and skills available in the community means communities can participate instead of being passive recipients of development initiatives, and this knowledge promotes sustainability.
- Proactive socio-economic planning gives the community a breathing space between closure and the establishment of alternative economic activities.
- A quick response to critical or potentially critical situations can prevent these situations from developing into entrenched attitudes and practices.
- Strong and visionary partnerships motivate the community, build trust, and ensure projects reflect community concerns, aspirations, and capacity.

- Quick-win projects lessen the risk of passivity and of survival strategies such as theft, violent crime, and prostitution. They also increase the skills pool that larger projects can draw up.