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ASSESSING THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND RURAL FACILITY (WRF) AS A SUSTAINABILITY CENTER

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science by coursework which degree is otherwise completed.

Johannesburg, 2009

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Masters of Science in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

A D Riethmiller

7th day of October 2009

ABSTRACT

Background: The WRF interfaces academically between science and politics and empirically between the developed and developing worlds. The question arises as to whether or not the WRF is an effective knowledge system conduit for science and technology to address sustainability challenges academically and also practically towards implementation to the extent that for practical purposes it is already a sustainability center as defined herein

Important considerations include but are not limited to, the following:

1 Sustainability is regarded possible only if science and technology are mobilized to action at an increased pace.

2 Climate change has become an important consideration, the effects of which forces global environmental change, but as perceived at local level.

Considerations used to assess the WRF were:

1. History and influence.
2. The current milieu of the WRF against the backdrop of the Southern African poor suffering a vulnerability crisis exacerbated by climate change.
3. The framework of Boundary Organizations and the effectiveness of the WRF as a boundary organization to influence sustainability positively.
4. Sustainability addresses multidisciplinary problems, demanding multi-dimensional answers and enhanced understanding and communication. Is the WRF an in-action, multi-dimensional sustainability center?
5. Implementation – Does the WRF enhance outcomes?

Methods:

This is a pilot study which investigated the WRF, a physical presence boundary organization in a poverty node, as a sustainability center. The qualitative method was followed. The WRF becomes a case-study inside this framework. Ten knowledgeable parties with first hand experience about WRF activities and relevance in the community

were interviewed. Interviewees were asked a set of closed questions and then invited to participate in a discussion on their replies to paint an in-depth practical picture about the WRF. In this way an understanding of the relevance of the WRF in respect of sustainability was gained. Results: All participants agreed the WRF is salient, credible and produces legitimate information. The foundations for boundary organizations recognized by the literature imply the WRF, as a conduit for multi-dimensional sustainability enhancing programmes, is in practical terms a sustainability center. The WRF is a node for multi-level multi-national research, communication and problem-solving. Against the wider concepts of boundary organizations also as dealt with by the literature, the WRF can be regarded as in-action sustainability with a physical presence on the border, both academically between science and politics and practically between the developed and undeveloped worlds.

This assessment shows the WRF is in practical terms a sustainability center. It enhances communication; unifies role-players and stimulates an inclusive problem-solving approach to research. It is visualized that a more formal classification as sustainability center with relevant personnel, for instance by the appointment of a sustainability manager, will enhance coordinated sustainability driven outcomes for the region. This could assist in mitigating the effects of climate change as well.

DEDICATIONS

For the vulnerable, poor and displaced

and

to my daughters, Zina and Gera Versfeld, reminding them of the memory of my late mother, Doris du Toit (1925 – 1999), who never gave up striving to help her fellow man and making a difference to the poor. She lived by the verses below.

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people, one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right 'Come you who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, Lord, when did I see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink. When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then He will say to those on His left 'depart from me, you are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer 'Lord when did we see you hungry or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothing, or sick and in prison and did not help you?' He will reply 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these; you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25: 31-46

"We at the WRF all suffer constant low level stress to see a sea of humanity in distress – I keep asking myself, is my work making a difference?" Dr Wayne

Twine, Manager WRF, 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Around the turn of the millennium I saw many projects fail at the implementation junction, when own agendas of people or organizations overruled the common goals of sustainability. I noticed the differences in language between commerce, government and science and even different nations and regions. Of those, science is the most important to investigate and address the ills of climate change. I realized I needed to become part of science to play a more meaningful role towards sustainability and sustainability management. Science will have to drive the process in the "renewability" age, where renewable energy sources have to become the driving force to curb climate change. However, academics do not like to manage or be managed. One therefore needed for sustainability management a new breed of people with a wide view and purpose who can bring together science, government, commerce and social structures in a coordinated goal-driven motivated way towards the common good of sustainability. I fancied the idea of being one of them! I acknowledge therefore with gratitude Professor Mary Scholes for keeping an open mind and allowing me into a Masters of Science program despite an otherwise legal and commercial background (B.Proc – University of the Witwatersrand and LLM – University of South Africa).

A salute to Dr Wayne Twine and the many enthusiasts (true "embedded boundary agents"!!) at the Wits Rural Facility (WRF) determined to bring sustainability to the community they are in. I am sincerely grateful to all who allowed me to share their experiences, making this research possible. Many affiliated to the WRF are pioneers functioning under difficult circumstances on the border between science and politics and between the developed and the developing worlds. The tensions of poverty, hunger and disease are experienced daily, yet, they prevail.

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