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Cannabis exchange: Empowering rural communities through the legal trade and production of Cannabis plant products

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ABSTRACT

What is becoming inherently more recognised within many of the rural settlements situated in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountain Range of South Africa are the effects of the illegal 'dagga' trade on the surrounding natural environment. The trade is predominantly a result of the poverty which is prevalent in the area (60.4% unemployment in Okhahlamba district). Although the region's economy is dominated by agricultural activities, the considerable agricultural potential within traditional settlement areas has not been used to it's full potential. As a result, this project seeks to empower the impoverished rural community in the Okhahlamba district of the Drakensberg through legal means of agriculture using hemp rather than dagga. Hemp is for the use in industrial applications compared to dagga used for the psychoactive effects. Plant fibre from the crops will be used as a by-product for the production of goods to go to market.

In finding ways of manufacturing products which are crafted from the illegal dagga crops, the building complex serves to PROCESS, EXCHANGE and EXHIBIT the craft of hemp production from the raw material to the finished product. The building will provide opportunities to educate on the processes and agricultural practices of industrial hemp production, and will promote tourism by showcasing this process and the goods to visitors. The medicinal potential of the cannabis plant will be investigated on site, providing a scientific research component to the activities of the complex.

The project develops an approach which is sensitive to both the local community and the land. The typology of farm buildings, vernacular architecture and the landscape building have been considered to engage with the rural context. The architectural response addresses the functions and characteristics of a rural public building, exploring and overlapping the perimeters of private-public space in order to expose the production process and showcase hemp.

This thesis does not aim to find a solution to the illegal trade of dagga, but rather to isolate a region where such activity does occur, provide an alternative that can have a positive impact on the community, enhancing social and environmental aspects of the area. It is the intention of this project to educate the community on the alternative hemp crop, placing focus on the cannabis plant or it's industrial, nutritional and medicinal benefits. Providing adult education within this rural area, the centre will give access to a great body of human knowledge, creating a platform for community interaction, contribution and development.