



## MILE EXECUTIVE DIALOGUE SERIES: LEARNING NOTE

# Dialogue Topic: Developing a Green Economy: Are we ready?

### 1. Purpose of this Learning Note

This Learning Note is an attempt to summarise the key learnings that arose at the Green Jobs MEDS seminar held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2010. The MEDS sessions are directed at high level executives in the council to encourage discussion and the exchange of ideas in an informal comfortable setting. This learning note is a first draft and you are encouraged as executives to add to these learnings, contributing to this field of knowledge in the city. It is hoped that this will go beyond the written form and that steps will be taken to implement strategies to embrace a green economy in the city.

### 2. Focus of the green economy MEDS Seminar

The green economy has been endorsed by President Zuma at a recent green summit held earlier this year in May where he stated that "We have no choice but to develop a green economy", but are we as a city ready for this change? What does changing to a green economy require of us, the senior management of eThekweni, and is it possible to create "green jobs" in all sectors of our Municipality?

Thought leaders for the day, Dr Ivor Sarakinsky of Economic Development at National level and Dr Guy Preston from the Natural Resource Management Programmes of the Department of Environmental Affairs, were invited to share their experiences with the eThekweni officials. The session was facilitated by Dr Sershen Naidoo from the University of KwaZulu-Natal who posed many questions along the way helping the executives to think about many of the issues surrounding the green economy.

### 3. Lessons Learned from Dr Sarakinsky's presentation

Dr Sarakinsky's presentation focused on giving us a general idea of what the green economy is about and what the opportunities as well as costs are of adopting a green economy ideology. These are the top lessons learned from the presentation:

3.1 In order to green the economy we need to produce more from the resources that we have and consume less resources.

3.2 When we talk about green jobs it is critical that jobs are not transferred, substituted or lost, but that new jobs are created.

3.3 These jobs need to be sustained and the Municipality needs to be aware of the costs involved in transferring to a green economy, including the costs of changing processes and the development of green technology.

3.4 Dr Sarakinsky highlighted possible areas for green job creation which include Energy efficiency, Renewable Energy, Waste Management, Carbon Friendly Transport, Biofuels, Agriculture and Agro-Processing, as well as the Built Environment.

3.5 Implementing building incentives for companies that use renewable energy, are energy efficient and use environmentally friendly materials is one way that local government can promote the green economy. However, renewable energy and energy efficiency both require high capital cost and do not result in high numbers of jobs.

3.6 A key sector that local government can get involved in is in the field of waste management and recycling. Although profit margins may be low, this sector offers opportunities for small business development and offers labour intensive employment. Recycling is a key sector and local government must unblock the constraints to the development of this sector.

3.6 Discussions after this session noted that the green economy is not a new concept and that the role of local government is to scan the environment and open up opportunities for employment.

#### **4. Lessons learned from discussion on the compilation of green initiatives currently happening in Durban**

This session involved a few of eThekweni's key department representatives who informed the executives of the current green initiatives that exist in the Municipality at present. This was done to get a sense of the status quo and ensure that projects would not be duplicated.

4.1 It was noted that there are departments such as the Environmental Planning and Climate Protection Department, Energy Office and Durban Cleansing and Solid Waste that have implemented green projects but that commitment from all departments is needed in order for the city to fully embrace the green economy and create green employment.

4.2 It was suggested by some executives that the green economy initiatives be coordinated by one central office in the Municipality and that perhaps each department should have a “green champion” who then reports to the central office.

## **5. Lessons Learned from Dr Guy Preston’s Presentation**

Dr Guy Preston gave the executives an overview of the programmes that Natural Resource Management is involved in that relate to the green economy to give the executives some idea of the different possibilities that exist in green job creation. The programmes include, Working for Water, Working for Wetlands, Working for Energy, Working on Fire, Working for Forests, Working for Land, Value added industries, and the KZN invasive Alien Species Programme. His main focus was on energy efficiency and employment in the area of eradicating alien invasive plants.

5.1 Alien invasive plants are a massive problem in South Africa as they take over space that is used by indigenous plants which leads to a decreased population in indigenous plants and animals, a loss in biodiversity. In addition they consume large amounts of water and in a water scarce country, which South Africa is; this is a major problem as there are no alternatives to safe drinking water if it is depleted.

5.2 The natural resources department trains local people to identify and remove alien invasive plants and has employed thousands of unskilled people.

5.3 Value added industries have been created where local people are employed to convert the alien vegetation that is removed into useful products, such as desks and coffins.

5.4 With the increase in global population and the movement of people, the invasion of alien plants, pests and human health risks is growing. More effort and money must be spent on curbing these invasions and many green jobs can be created in this sector.

5.5 eThekweni cannot look at the problem of invasives, and any environmental problem for that matter, in isolation and must work with municipalities adjacent to it, especially those that are in the same catchment system or all the hard work could result to nothing.

## **6 Lessons from the discussion**

6.1 Many environmental problems can be solved through the use of technology but we as a Municipality need to think about how we can include people in the equation so that jobs are created.

6.2 Our perceptions of how the Municipality spends money needs to change and spending on the unfamiliar must be encouraged even if it is less lucrative.

6.3 Careers that are more carbon neutral should be encouraged in eThekweni, such as jobs in the Arts. Green Jobs do not have to be environmental jobs.

6.4 eThekweni must align its green initiatives with the National Green Agenda.

6.5 It was suggested by an executive that procurement should use greening as a category in the tender process and points be given to those companies with green practices.

6.6 It is difficult to change the mindsets of people. Poor people also want the best services. It is difficult to convince someone that a water-less toilet is better than the conventional toilet and to teach them the value of saving water especially when the rich have the luxury of flush toilets. All levels of society need to embrace energy and water saving technologies and practices so that greener technologies are not seen as second best.

6.7 Green technologies need to be financially viable in order for them to be embraced.

6.8 The question of human capacity and skills was raised. Does eThekweni have the skilled people to embrace green technologies and what will the cost be to train people in this field.

6.9 It is critical that the executives of eThekweni embrace the Green economy ideology but are we as executives convinced that the green economy is the path to be followed?

6.10 Investment in research and development of green technology needs to be fast tracked.

6.11 Executives agreed that the Municipality is in the best position to pilot green projects and that these can serve as demonstration to business and civil society to implement similar strategies.

6.12 An academic raised the point that the word “green” is often seen in a negative light and a popular discourse of the day is that the environmental issues are an obstacle to development. Environmental issues are much broader than just green issues and include brown issues as well. Perhaps a different term should be used to describe this economy.

6.13 The green economy can be a vehicle to help alleviate poverty and develop skills.

6.14 eThekweni must learn from the examples of other cities but we as executives need to be careful not to implement projects from the first world that have no relevance to our context.

## **7. Concluding thoughts**

Although the number of executives present was disappointing, those that attended were excited about embracing the green economy in eThekweni. Much work has been done by the Energy Office and Environmental Planning and Climate Protection Department, however it was

felt that all departments in eThekweni need to embrace green principles and look for opportunities to develop green employment. The implementation of green champions in each department was seen as a way forward to achieving this vision. Integration with the IDP and Long term development plan of eThekweni is crucial if the green economy is taken seriously. The areas of recycling, waste management, renewable energy, energy efficiency, the clearing of alien invasive species and value added industries were seen as possible job opportunities in the green economy.



Guest speakers and members of the MILE Team seen at the Green Jobs MEDS.