

**Welcome at the Centre for Social Development
Early Childhood Development Conference**

Rhodes University

13 September 2007

The Chair and Director of the CSD, conference participants and speakers, and colleagues, molweni, good morning.

A very warm welcome to Rhodes University; and to guests from elsewhere to iRhini/Grahamstown, the Makana District, and the Eastern Cape!

Rhodes University and its Centre for Social Development are very pleased to host this conference to explore a 'Community Development Approach to Early Childhood Development'.

The CSD has long been a vital force for educational and social development, equity and justice in the iRhini/Grahamstown community and the wider Eastern Cape, and an important breeding ground for community development workers.

This conference is an important attempt to link early childhood development and community development,

which is well-indicated by the phrase 'It takes a Village to Raise a Child'.

The holistic and integrated approach to early childhood development advocated and practiced by the CSD, which links ECD to community development, has not only great merit but is perhaps also the only guarantee of the long-term sustainability and success of ECD.

So too, is the CSD's principled approach to development, which sees development as working with people in an unassuming and respectful way and drawing on their wisdom, knowledge, commitment and resources; rather than 'development' as doing things for people, or 'development' as something that is done by government, agencies, or experts for people.

In the year that we commemorate the 30th anniversary of Steve Biko's killing, it is appropriate to recall that Biko was a powerful advocate of self-reliance: of, to use his words, black people not standing 'at the touchlines' but doing 'things for themselves' as part of developing black pride and assertiveness and achieving 'psychological' and 'physical' liberation.

The conference announcement states that the conference is an opportunity to introduce the CSD's pioneering

'community development approach to early childhood development'. The conference theme, however, makes it clear states that this is *also* an invitation to ECD and community development organisations and practitioners to *examine* 'a community development approach to ECD'.

The CSD's location at a university, and at Rhodes University in particular, makes both of its intentions – to share and to examine - very appropriate.

On the one hand, having pioneered a particular approach to ECD it is an obligation of the CSD to openly and freely share its knowledge and accumulated wisdom and experiences with others. That is one of the reasons that we have universities – what use are knowledge and information if they are selfishly locked away and not shared and put to use in the service of people and humanity?

On the other hand, a university is a place where there must be the freedom to think and analyse issues critically. The conference theme call to *examine* a 'community development approach to ECD' is also an open invitation to you to not just accept the CSD approach but to think deeply about it, scrutinize it, raise critical questions, weigh it up and carefully assess the approach.

I am confident that the colleagues in the CSD will welcome this, as it is only through this kind of open engagement does knowledge and understanding grow, and such knowledge and understanding are the conditions for improving our practices of ECD and community development.

To introduce the spirit of critical dialogue, we *know* that important economic and social development issues and challenges at the community level are often approached in isolation from one another. You will agree that this is *not* ideal and that we should avoid this. Yet this still happens and there various reasons for this and, sometimes, perhaps even good strategic and practical reasons for this.

What is to be done? How will we move? Can the CSD approach succeeded everywhere and under all conditions? What all must be in place for success? Can we put all in place? If not, what do we do? How can we move? What is to be done?

In closing, I hope that the conference be marked by a flourishing of knowledge, ideas and discussion, and that you will have a most stimulating, productive and enjoyable stay at Rhodes and in Rhini/Grahamstown.