**CASE STUDY**

Zibambele: job creation and poverty alleviation merges with civil engineering

***04 March, 2013:*** *Internationally-recognised consultancy firm SMEC and civils and structural engineering services provider Naidu Consulting are playing an instrumental role in the monitoring and reporting of eThekwini Roads and Stormwater Maintenance (RSM) Department’s Zibambele Poverty Alleviation Programme – an initiative that is creating sustainable job opportunities for the impoverished and unemployed through the maintenance of the eThekwini rural road network.*

SMEC South Africa Section Manager: Roads and Highways and Assistant Project Director **Kresen Manicum** points out that the Zibambele Poverty Alleviation Programme was launched in 1999 by the then MEC of Transport, Sbu Ndebele. The Programme was piloted by the Department of Transport and was designed to be both cost effective and provide sustainable work opportunities to destitute families.

“What distinguishes Zibambele from other poverty alleviation programmes is that it creates meaningful work for destitute woman-headed households. While providing these households with poverty alleviation and sustainable work opportunities, Zibambele is also addressing fundamental objectives of the Government of South Africa, through the routine maintenance of the eThekwini Municipality rural road network and other assets,” explains Kresen.

Households rather than individuals are engaged to carry out maintenance activities by being assigned a length of road, varying from 0,3 km to 0,5 km depending on the difficulty of the terrain. Currently there are approximately 6 000 contractors on the eThekwini Municipality Zibambele programme which equates to an estimated 2 500 km of eThekwini road network. The programme provides contractors with two days per week to perform their road maintenance tasks, which includes: maintenance of the road drainage system; ensuring good roadside visibility; maintenance of the road surface in good condition; clearing of the road verges of litter and noxious weeds; and other labour-intensive activities as determined from time to time.

The contractors, who are mainly women, are selected by the community and are employed on a 12-month contract. Upon expiry, the community either opts to renew or replace the contactor based on performance, eligibility in terms of a means test and approval of the area committee structures.

Kresen says that the programme has been designed to facilitate the exiting or graduating of contractors to other initiatives which will improve their livelihoods. “This can be achieved in a number of ways, including: providing accredited training through a learnership programme, the formation of savings clubs and co-operatives where Contractors can group together to save money and through partnerships with other government departments or private sector organisations

**Implementation, Monitoring and reporting**

The SMEC and Naidu Consulting Joint Venture, which comprises a team of thirty passionate staff who are involved in the project on a daily basis, play an active role in the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the Zibambele Poverty Alleviation Programme. In order to properly manage the monitoring and reporting of each contractor, as well as the work underway/completed, SMEC developed its Zibambele Information Management System (ZIMS).

ZIMS is a web-based system and provides a simple, effective and user-friendly interface to both manage and monitor the programme. The field team retrieve information using technology such as GPS Trimble Devices, which is then imported into ZIMS. The result is a live database which manages the details of each contractor, such as ID number, days worked per month, tool information and payment information. The website is accessible to the client and other key stakeholders, which ensures that they can view the live status of the project at any time and from anywhere.

The system, which is solely developed and owned by SMEC, generates the number of Full Time Equivalents (FTE’s) produced through the programme each month. The accurate and timeous reporting of FTE’s ensures that the eThekwini Municipality gains access to Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) incentive grant funding. The operations team also assist the eThekwini Municipality with incident reporting in these rural areas, by reporting for example, on bad roads or illegal dumping. This helps the municipality to ensure that rapid incident response with significant associated savings in terms of maintenance and property damage.

Kresen points out that the system is fully compliant with the EPWP and therefore ensures auditability and accountability of the programme. Projects, which are of a similar nature as the Zibambele Programme, with respect to having a labour intensive component, are required to monitor and report on the performance and outputs of such projects. The ZIMS system which is a robust system, complies with Auditor General and Treasury regulations with respect to monitoring and reporting on Programme Beneficiaries, expenditure and management of assets. This enables the system to be viable for use in other projects as the monitoring and reporting structure of the system can be applied, with same customisation, to any project.

The utilisation of the system comes at no cost to the client and this serves as another value added service to ensure efficiency, accountability and transparency.

SMEC and its JV partner, Naidu Consulting, have quality management processes which have been adopted from their core business practices, to ensure that the information reported by the system is accurate and meets the reporting requirements of eThekwini Municipality and the EPWP.

The Zibamabele programme is not only providing poverty alleviation for destitute eThekwini communities and maintaining rural roads, but is also enabling capacity building and empowerment. The Zibambele field coordinators, which serve as the link between the programme’s contractors and overseers, are individuals studying towards a National Diploma in Civil Engineering. Involvement in the programme affords the individuals the opportunity to fulfill the experiential training as required to obtain their qualification.

The programme, which currently has the capacity to take on 28 students per year, not only provides each student with the experiential training necessary to obtain their qualification, but also teaches technical skill, such as conducting visual condition indexes and driving skills.

"When one evaluates the Zibambele contract system against other poverty alleviation programmes Zibambele stands out because it creates meaningful work and enhances human dignity which is associated with being gainfully employed. Zibambele creates a sense of community ownership and pride in the maintenance of public assets. Zibambele is a wonderful example of how a programme designed to alleviate poverty can indeed be gender affirmative, employ the neediest and still be successful in delivering a basic level of services in a cost effective manner.” Says Mr Mark Tomlinson, eThekwini Project Manager, Roads and Stormwater Maintenance.

The SMEC and Naidu Consulting project team was recently awarded the SAICE 2011/2012 Most Outstanding Civil Engineering Project in the category: Community Based Project at the SAICE National 2012 Awards Evening for demonstrating the social and economic benefits the programme has in the eThekwini Municipality toward the contractors employed in the programme.

“SMEC and Naidu Consulting JV is proud to be associated with a programme such as Zibambele and hopes that the relationship can continue into the future. “A lot of hard work, time and dedication by all team members has contributed towards making this a successful and award winning project for SMEC,” states Kresen.

Looking ahead, Kresen says that with skills development and capacity building lying at the heart of the Programme, more emphasis will be placed on the development of the youth on the Programme and the formation of structured co-operatives. The project team also plans on being more innovative on the Zibambele Programme by researching new technologies and applying these to ensure the continued success of the Programme. Based on the success the Programme has had within the KwaZulu-Natal province, future plans to roll-out the Programme nationally, to all the other provinces, and are being conceptualised.

With poverty being prevalent not only in South Africa, but in many other SADC countries, the Zibambele Poverty Alleviation Programme has great potential to be used as a best practice model in these countries and this will be another development the project team will be investigating going forward.

***Ends.***

**Notes to the Editor**There are numerous photographs specific to this press release. Please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click the Vela VKE (Part of the SMEC Group) link.

**About SMEC**Australian based SMEC has more than 4 000 employees and an established network of over 60 offices worldwide. SMEC provides consultancy services for the lifecycle of a project to a broad range of sectors, which include; hydropower, transport, water, natural resources and environment, geotechnical, mining, tunnelling, urban development, renewable energy, power, government and advisory services and social infrastructure development. Following the Vela VKE merger, the SMEC Group now has over 5 000 employees and an established network of over 70 offices in 36 countries throughout Australia, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Pacific, North and South America.

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