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SUSTAINABILITY FACTSHEET #11

Employee, community and public empowerment in the clay brick sector

Socio-economic sustainability concerns the parameters that affect people’s opportunities, now and in the future, to fulfil their potential as well attain their basic needs such as livelihoods, social and environmental justice, human rights, among others.

The clay brick sector can go further in this regard by empowering their employees, collaborating with the local communities and clay brick sustainability research and reporting.

Technical Contributors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Complementing its current socio-economic impact areas such as health and safety, employment, human rights and equity, the clay brick sector can further positively impact its employees, local communities as well as the wider public.

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Continuous employee development is a good way of ensuring that workers replenish and acquire new skills that can benefit them within and out of the workplace to improve their standards of living. Some of the areas of development could be in financial literacy, public health as well as practical and soft skills development. This is a step further for the brick sector from just creating 210,000 employment opportunities but providing information that could potentially improve the quality of life of its large workforce.

COLLABORATION WITH AND EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Brick making factories exist within local communities who are impacted by their operations both positively and negatively over a long period of time. Therefore, collaboration and building community relations is important for the benefit and growth of both the brick makers and their host communities and it can be done through;

Supporting community-based suppliers

Sourcing products and services within their local communities and growing community-based organisations to meet their demands aids in the growth and development of local suppliers. These can grow to meet the company's demand as well as that of other companies that require similar products or services. Some of the products and services that can be sourced locally or supported to be supplied locally are:

- Recycling and production of plastics for transportation and covering of bricks
- Recycling and production of pallets for the transportation of bricks
- Mechanical and electrical maintenance services

This type of community engagement has been successful with Apollo Brick in Midrand who partnered with Ekurhuleni Municipality to support a cooperative in Tembisa to start up a plastic plant. This cooperative has fully grown to supply different types of plastics for other brick makers and thus a source of livelihood for the members and their communities (CBA, 2017).



Technical and practical skills development

Wider technical and practical skills development for communities and the public can be attained through learnerships and apprenticeships for students, workshops, courses and partnerships with colleges and universities. This could be in skills that may not only be applicable in the brick making sector but other relevant areas for the development of the communities.

It is also through such skills development workshops that the informal brick producers can be approached and information is shared on the best practices for business and brick making and how these can be incorporated at their different scales.

CLAY BRICK SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH AND REPORTING

The full picture of the impacts along the value chain of clay brick as well as of the formal and informal practices remains largely unknown in South Africa. Comprehensive research and data collection on the current status of both informal and informal practices within the sector contributes to knowledge and offers an informed direction for the sector.

For a wider outreach and impact, this research and data could be further translated and illustrated in the local languages and packaged for ease of accessibility by both the literate and illiterate public. Some of the important areas for sustainability research and data collection are:

- Technical guidelines and business case for moving to cleaner kilns and the implication on livelihoods
- Life-cycle financial and health impacts and benefits for the production and use of different types of clay bricks
- Resource use, savings and wastage for different production methods and the wider impacts on the environment and livelihoods

In addition to empowering the public, government and construction industry with knowledge and tools, the research and data further offers benchmarks for tracking changes within the sector.

CONCLUSION

Socio-economic interventions require the brick makers to go beyond simply focusing on their production lines and plan with the people and the communities who are impacted by the different activities along the value chain of the clay bricks. Successful implementation of socio-economic interventions results into improved quality of life and empowerment of employees and local communities which in turn improves the image, business, relationships and support for the brick making businesses.



Figure 1: Photo courtesy of Makana Brick, Eastern Cape

REFERENCES

Schmidt, C. W. (2013). Modernizing Artisanal Brick Kilns: A Global Need. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 121(8), a242–a249.

Please see the **CBA Sustainability Report 2017** for detail on the socio-economic challenges, objectives and achievements of the clay brick manufacturing sector.

For further information:

The Clay Brick Association of South Africa

Website: www.claybrick.org