

# The need for forward-thinking ESD strategies in South Africa's rural communities

By [Mpopi Khupe](#)

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In South Africa's corporate engagement within rural and peri-urban communities, a recurring narrative persists: a bias towards non-core ESD programmes and interventions overshadows the essential need for holistic, forward-thinking Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) strategies to boost small business growth.



Source: [www.unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

## Sustainable impact

As an entrepreneurship support organisation that works directly with rural and peri-urban MSMEs, our perspective provides a revealing insight into the subtle, yet critical, difference between and importance of a well thought through and clearly articulated ESD strategy. As well as the need for the successful implementation thereof to be facilitated by a comprehensive, aligned implementation plan that enables targeted execution in fostering tangible community change.

Quantifiable metrics like the B-BBEE ESD scorecard serve as anchors for companies, yet they often overshadow the immeasurable value of qualitative results that can be derived from medium-term ESD programmes and short-term SME capacity building interventions. The crux of the matter lies in reconciling the pursuit of scorecard points with the genuine quest for tangible, sustainable impact.



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A critical component that often reveals missteps is the disconnection between an overarching ESD strategy and the on-ground implementation thereof. What we often see is varying degrees of meticulousness in the crafting ESD strategy, one which seeks to offer an expression of visionary aspirations and long-term objectives, only to falter when it trickles down to the execution level. The crucial point at which strategy meets action often lacks the requisite clarity, leaving operational teams unable to carve out their direct role and contribution to the strategic objectives, which creates fertile ground for ESD execution efforts that demonstrate effort but deviate from the company's strategic intent.

The essence of a robust ESD strategy lies not only in its articulation but in its translation into a coherent roadmap for implementation. Indeed, the ESD strategy is the compass steering a company's SME capacity building and enablement objectives, embracing the mission, vision, and objectives underpinning supplier diversity and sustainable MSME growth.

However, the strategy alone cannot manifest change without a harmonised implementation plan. This plan, the nuts-and-bolts counterpart to the broader strategy, delineates actionable steps, assigns responsibilities, and allocates resources. It's the blueprint translating the company's vision into coordinated, executable tasks at operational levels.

## **Reflection**

Recognising the proximity of operational teams to the implementation plan elevates the importance of its role. It's the lighthouse guiding day-to-day activities, and ensuring alignment with the broader strategic objectives.

As we usher in a new year, a moment of reflection presents itself - a call for deliberate introspection. Reflecting on past approaches and embracing agility in course correction solidifies the foundation for continued success. Achievement of our shared direct MSME capacity building and indirect community upliftment goals lie not in rigid adherence to an ESD strategy and/or implementation plan that may no longer be doing justice to guiding us towards our true north, but in the continuous refinement and relevance of both. Done right we will continue to see impactful, tangible results in our quest to level the playing field for small businesses that rely on us to provide them with the means to gain a foothold in the formal economy.

Let us embark on this journey with an unwavering commitment - a commitment to weaving a seamless thread between ESD strategy and MSME programmes and interventions execution, thereby giving momentum to a transformative narrative that echoes across communities and transcends the tactical for the truly impactful.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mpopi Khupe is co-founder and CEO at Zevoli Growth Partners.

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