

# CLING PROJECT ACTIVITIES

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The CLING project has been mobilising entire urban and rural communities around enhancing the literacy and numeracy abilities of everybody who lives there.

By proceeding from a broad understanding of the term 'literacy' – which means discovering increasingly how to read the word *and* the world (Paulo Freire) – everybody's interests are taken into account. This means, for example, exposing young children to books, stories and number; encouraging teachers and schools to assemble class and school libraries; persuading adults (especially reluctant men) to increase their facility in reading and computation; obtaining support from community leaders and, particularly important, bringing state agencies such as Education, Health, Safety and Security and others into the process.

Each community identifies its priorities and specific areas of focus through the representative **Community Literacy and Numeracy Group**, the CLING. The CLING then sets up a programme of action and the project provides start-up or seed money of R5 000 per annum and stipends for two young people who are community activists, for a period of five years, to support the CLING and conduct research on behalf of the Project.

In this way, those communities that continue to be trapped by poverty and apartheid-induced lack of confidence and volition can be roused into finding ways of addressing many of the social and educational problems by using their own resources. It should be noted, however, that this is a long, slow and arduous process. No quick-fix, magical wand-waving methods are involved here. But, also, we should never underestimate the resourcefulness, the determination and the resilience of communities.

So as to awaken interest in and the importance of enhanced literacy and numeracy, the CLING project has included a number of activities, all of them local and specific to each community. In Freedom Park (next to Soweto, Gauteng) unused show houses have been used as public libraries and places where learners can go to after school. In Tshatshu (near King Williams Town, Eastern Cape), a vacant high school classroom has been converted into a community library staffed by Grade 11 Life Orientation learners.

The Tshatshu community now holds regular literacy festivals and workshops, where learners and teachers demonstrate their reading and other skills. Because of the high incidence of the abuse of young children in this village, a place of safety, run by a retired and highly qualified nursing sister, has been established where young and old are able to read silently and tell stories in safety. Also ABET classes have been enlarged and the community intends to erect a

multi-purpose centre which will accommodate ABET, social services and be a community and information centre.

Two Limpopo-based CLINGs – one in Davhana, Venda and the other in Siyandhani, near Giyani – have embarked on a major campaign for teachers, learners, community leaders and youth to become researchers of community needs and situations. This is so that they can acquire knowledge sufficient to address matters such as school dropouts and pushouts, teenage pregnancy, and best ways in which to use community expertise. This could include the use of arts and culture as well as the skills with plants and the psychological expertise of traditional healers, so as to enrich local education, including schooling. In addition, ECD, ABET and skills acquisition such as computer literacy are being increased and supported by using reading clubs, poetry and drama festivals with music and other forms of recreation and entertainment to invigorate communities into achieving confidence in the value and use of their abilities and resources. The Siyandhani community is using funds from winning a land claims case to erect a multi-purpose community centre and two clinics: one for western and the other for traditional medicine.

The CLING in Evaton North, near Vereeniging, Gauteng, recently started a “shack library”, the first of its kind. The community members made the shelves and painted the shack, and gathered books for the library. Precarious as its situation is, the launch of this library was attended by a representative from the Ekurhuleni library services and the Gauteng MEC for Arts and Culture. The CLING activists/researchers there are now being trained in library administration. Plans for a permanent library are now being made.

The CLING project places a high premium on active co-operation with government agencies at local, provincial and national levels. The Education Department’s Rural Education Directorate has participated in a CLING Limpopo workshop as have circuit officials from Giyani and Vuwani. There is also strong support from the local officials in the Eastern Cape Department of Education. They are speaking in terms of establishing CLINGs in other communities.

Given that funding for this project ends in 2011, the sustainability and continuation of the CLINGs has become a major area of concern. The CLINGs need to be integrated thoroughly into their communities with the support of local leadership and community structures. There are positive signs that this might be achieved.

In communities which are poor and which have been made to exist on the margins of rural and urban development, people who participate in projects of this kind have to make major sacrifices of their time and energy to start and sustain activities of these kinds. Contrary to opinions that we have heard from certain highly-placed figures, there is a deep interest in the quality and relevance of education for young and old. The powerful desire that is evident in

communities to enhance the life chances of the young and to improve the quality of the life of adults can be used to overcome the debilitating and corrosive effects of poverty and neglect.

The CLING project has been working under the umbrella of the 3Rs Project<sup>1</sup>– which approaches matters of literacy and numeracy jointly in terms of the organisational strengths and styles of its participants. The 3Rs Project began in 2007 and is funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy.

Researchers in the CLING project regard highly the positive responses by communities to the participatory nature of the engagement, to being mobilised around educational issues and to discovering the potency and potential of local resources. From such communities will emerge citizens eager to realise their rights and to hold the government accountable for what it does and does not provide.

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<sup>1</sup> Those involved are: the Human Sciences Research Council, the Joint Education Trust, the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa, and the Education Policy Consortium, of which the CEPD is a member.