

SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES TO THRIVE

Findings and lessons from a 2023 evaluation



**SOCIAL CHANGE
ASSISTANCE TRUST**

SCAT is a non-profit organisation and an intermediary funder engaged in ensuring human rights for South African rural communities since 1984.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION

A principles-focused evaluation of SCAT's work from 2017-2022 aiming to inform the next five-year strategy, asking:

- Was SCAT's strategy over the last five years pursued in accordance with its principles and did this lead to its desired results and impact?
- What was the impact of COVID on SCAT's work?
- What challenges and opportunities does the current context pose for SCAT's work going forward?
- How can SCAT strengthen its organisational sustainability and capacity?

SCAT'S PRINCIPLES

Working conversationally and inclusively with SCAT staff, and drawing on the work of Michael Quinn Patton¹, the evaluation process identified seven principles that infuse all of SCAT's work. The evaluation sought out where these principles manifest in SCAT's practice, and in the lives and organisations of those it serves.

RESOURCEFULNESS:

Working with local knowledge, assets and solutions - SCAT works with what is local and unique.

CHANGE: Working for redress, justice and equity; in practice, helping to shift conditions and enable greater choice.

TAKE CHARGE: "You are in charge of your life." Assisting and promoting action for change, driven by those seeking it (supporting agency).

ACCOUNTABILITY: Acting with and promoting accountability for human, physical and financial resources.

FUTURE: "Investing in the future" – a commitment to young people and the planet.

SUSTAINABILITY: Supporting sustainability by keeping relevant, being reflective and responsive, and encouraging the same in LDAs.

PARTNERSHIPS: Working collaboratively and in partnership.

KEY FINDINGS

SCAT builds and amplifies organisational capacity for values-based action at community level. This is a rare and important thing, especially for South Africa at this point in history. The evaluation found that, between 2017-2022:

SCAT'S REACH GREW

Through LDAs, SCAT indirectly benefitted 3.4 million people from marginalised/underserved rural communities and enabled over 100,000 people to receive direct assistance. During 2017-2022:

- SCAT's work grew: from budget of R5 million to R29 million
- SCAT worked with 30 LDAs in four provinces (EC, NC, WC, FS)
- SCAT expanded work to include climate adaptation and food security.

SCAT WAS STRONG IN ITS CORE WORK

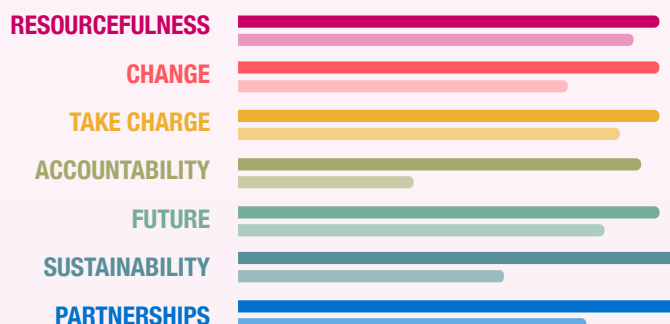
"[SCAT] is amazing at what it does."

SCAT had good reach, benefitted the lives of many people who did not have any other access to the services that SCAT supports, and maintained well established, strong and trusted relationships.

SCAT WAS ALIGNED WITH ITS PRINCIPLES

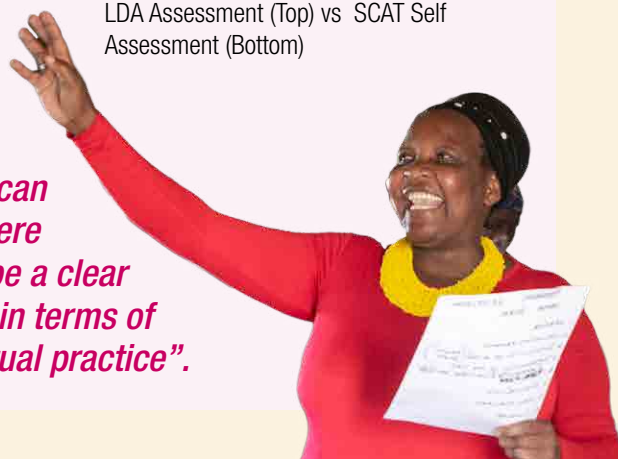
SCAT's principles were given expression and pursued in its three key and highly valued activity areas with LDAs: funding, capacity building and field support - as well as in its role as intermediary. Accepting that one tends to be more self-critical, it is interesting that SCAT's self-assessment of its alignment with its principles corresponded with that of LDA's. It was, however, markedly more critical of its efforts to support Accountability and Sustainability, both in itself and in LDAs.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS SCAT'S WORK ALIGNED WITH ITS PRINCIPLES?



"In SCAT's case, although principles can be lofty, there seems to be a clear alignment in terms of SCAT's actual practice".

LDA Assessment (Top) vs SCAT Self Assessment (Bottom)





HOW SCAT CAN HAVE MORE IMPACT

In addition to its own self-assessed areas for improvement, the changing context of South Africa makes its own exacting demands on SCAT for the future. The following areas for change and recommendations were made with this in mind:

“They could be influencing more so that there is greater understanding of the realities, that can shift the response.”

STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS

Develop some of the programme areas to have more impact, eg support stronger specific and targeted programming for working with youth; analyse power dynamics across SCAT’s entire architecture, share analyses and work to shift power at all levels; help to change the current limited funding model for LDAs.

RECOMMENDATION: Continue with excellent grounded and responsive and relational work with rural communities, and possibly expand partnerships with values-aligned organisations to deepen and strengthen SCAT’s response to needs along chosen thematic areas – making sure to resource adequately for any expansion.

USE EVIDENCE TO MAKE RURAL ISSUES VISIBLE

Collect and use data more intentionally and systematically to make rural issues and work in rural areas visible, and thereby possibly create more favourable funding and human rights conditions.

RECOMMENDATION: Support LDAs to enable their voices to be heard extensively, providing platforms, and sharing data, research, stories, models and developing shared research and communication strategies. This enables evidence-based advocacy and programming.

BUILD MORE SOLIDARITY AND COLLABORATION

Support collective action and movement building by linking LDAs and other rural role-players to each other, with a bounded role in that space.

RECOMMENDATION: Utilise convening power and opportunities to build solidarity and possible collaboration amongst LDAs and other partners, not just with one aim of training; but convening funders (including government) to develop collaborative responses to rural needs.

REVIEW CONTEXT AND REVISE PROGRAMMING

Look at current context and revisit SCAT’s theory of change and scope of reach, in light of the context, to ensure continued relevance of work.

RECOMMENDATION: Undertake a context scan for SA’s economic and governance prospects to use as a basis for SCAT’s next round of strategic planning.

“We are indeed living in an era of a failed state, and what are the implications? ...It’s definitely not business as usual.”

BUILD SMARTER INTERNAL SYSTEMS

Consider SCAT’s own continuity and succession, and actual realisation of its desire to be a feminist organisation, as well as more intentionally reflect on its power and practice, staying in touch with the realities of resourcing.

RECOMMENDATION: Create smarter systems that enable more evidence-based reflection and learning, and more staff development especially with regards to staff understanding of the economic and political contexts they are working to transform.

