

DDP Founding Director: Dr Rama Naidu

Dr Rama Naidu started his career as an academic in the Department of Geography at UKZN where he completed his PhD in social geography. Moved on to head the Department of Geography at the Umlazi College for Further Education where he was soon appointed as Vice-Rector, a post he held up to 1993.

In June 1993 he was appointed as the Executive Director of a Programme initiated by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation called the Democracy Development Programme (DDP) until December 2018, when he realised it was time for a change. Having carefully engineered a succession plan to ensure the sustainability of the organisation it was time to hand over the reins.

As the founding director his task was to create and build an organisation that would mobilise citizens, promote good governance and nurture the birth of a strong civil society. This was a historic time in the dawn of our new democracy in South Africa and the DDP played a critical role in KZN as we wrestled with governance issues of political intolerance and made citizens aware of their rights and responsibilities.



The core of the work in the early years called for intense negotiations as the province wrestled with the notions of co-governance between the ANC and the IFP and the DDP under his guidance played a leading role in brokering a working relationship between the ANC and IFP in the first coalition government in the country.

During his tenure, the organization became a leading light in the civil society sector in the province leading the way in terms of innovative civic education programs, capacity building for fledgling NGOs, and a loud voice for public participation processes to be institutionalized. The DDP has been a lead organization for many partnerships both in the province and nationally concerning voter education and election observation. Dr Naidu served on the national steering committee for election observation and served as an African Union observer for a while. He led the first Civil society election coalition in the province and established the brand of the organization as one of the most well-run organizations in the province.

He has also served as a reference group member of the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN) for several years and the DDP remains an important contributor to its work. In addition, he is a Director of Symphonia for South Africa and has been a consultant for Community Building nationally.



During his tenure at DDP, he realized three important lessons. The first was related to the power of partnerships in all the work of the organization and the need to connect to organizations that were working on the ground. Many of these partnerships have resulted in lasting friendships and many collaborative projects across the country. One of the longest-standing partnerships has been with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The DDP remains one of its largest global partners for the past 25 years. The partnership for him personified the respect that partners should have for each other when having a common purpose. This purpose is what has driven him to remain in this partnership for so long and make such a huge contribution to consolidating the democratic process in South Africa. The relationship offered the possibility to explore new methods and possibilities to connect citizens to their

rights and responsibilities concerning the State. From street theatre to community radio and video productions the DDP became the leading light in the province.

A second lesson related to the theory of change that has dominated the DDP paradigm of development for the past 20+ years. Having been trained as an organizational development practitioner and experienced many new methodologies of civic education globally he applied the principle of accompaniment as a key principle underlying all the work of the organization. For several years under his leadership, the DDP became the leading organization of the Pan African Civic Educators Network (PACENET) across Africa. He also made time to continue his studies into the world of organizational development focusing on transformational leadership and an understanding of how to work with communities on their terms.

Simply stated, the principle recognizes the need to walk with the communities and partners on their developmental journey and not try to co-opt them or set the agenda. This search led him into a new way of appreciating the reasons why so many communities remained angry and in a continual state of dependence. His studies led him to the work of Peter Block, John Mc Knight, and Margaret Wheatly who demonstrated another development paradigm where the power resided with the people who were most affected and often called “the target group”.

A third lesson relates to what is now commonly called “the DDP methodology” which remains the legacy he leaves behind in the organization. Having personally tried more than 100 community facilitators who now adopt the methodology based on the true power of the people we work with. It is based broadly on several key elements for building an authentic community. This remains the work that he is fully committed to and work that will drive his life as he moves into other areas of community work. Having pioneered the DDP methodology of storytelling and sharing as peers this has become the hallmark of all our gatherings as we continue to invert the paradigm of experts waiting to tell us how to solve all our issues and know instead that the wisdom already resides in each one of us.

Over the years his interest had shifted into artful facilitation and completed two international organizational development courses that changed the course of his life. Now an internally trained Gestalt facilitator he uses himself as the most important tool to raise awareness and bring about transformative changes. This was all incorporated into the work of the DDP and he dedicated over 25 years at the coalface facilitating processes and building partnerships based on respect, accountability, and commitment. He continues to spend more time doing process facilitation and has used this methodology both nationally and internationally.

His mission in life is to disrupt the current thinking about development and transformation through a profound inversion of the notions of power, structure, and control to one of inclusion, generosity, and abundance.