

The future of Sedgefield - bridging the divide between town and Smutsville

By Lucy Faulkner, University of Exeter, UK.

I have had the privilege of conducting research in Sedgefield for three months for my PhD in Geography, University of Exeter, UK, with support from the Sustainability Research Unit, NMMU, George campus. I have been exploring how residents living in Sedgefield town and Smutsville are able to respond to different risks and unexpected events that they may face both now and in the future. In doing so, I have facilitated a series of workshops that have supported residents in thinking about what Sedgefield and Smutsville could look like in 2050; what they want it to look like; what can be done to work towards their desired futures taking place; and whose responsibility is it to support these futures occurring.

This has proved to be a useful and enlightening exercise. Residents have reported that these workshops have enabled them to think differently when planning for an uncertain future. This has included reflecting on what community action is currently being undertaken and what changes may need to be made so that progress towards their desired futures can occur. Although participants in Sedgefield town and Smutsville



developed different scenarios around what they would like their community in 2050 to look like, there were similarities between them, especially around education and the desire for better community leadership. Substantial focus for both sets of residents was also on how to work better together so that more effective community outcomes can be achieved longer term.

Due to the success of these workshops, a joint meeting with participants from Sedgefield town and Smutsville has recently been held. This provided the opportunity for residents to share with each other their visions for the future to aid greater understanding between residents over what it is

they want and what their individual perspectives are. This included discussion around their differences and concrete steps about what can be done next. A second meeting will be arranged between residents so that this communication continues, with the aim of involving wider community interest and support in the process.

Prior to undertaking her PhD, Lucy worked in the field of international development on pro-poor responses to climate change adaptation at community level in Bangladesh and Africa. She has worked with both private and international non-governmental organisations, research institutes, and multilateral agencies.