



Vollar Impact Study on Kylemore

INTRODUCTION

Kylemore is a 94 ha settlement situated 10km outside of Stellenbosch in the Dwarsrivier valley. It has a predominantly “coloured” racial background, with a steady influx of Xhosa speaking workers settling annually. The small white population of the town mainly consists of small farm owners.

The town was created by Dutch Reformed Mission members from the town of Pniel, and was historically settled on by landowners and labourers working on the surrounding farms. Land owners coming from Pniel established a more affluent area within the town which contrasted the informal corrugated iron houses and shacks of the agricultural working class. These areas became known as the onder-dorp (Downtown) and the bo-dorp (Uptown) respectively, and has persisted as a division between the upper/middle and agricultural working classes until today.

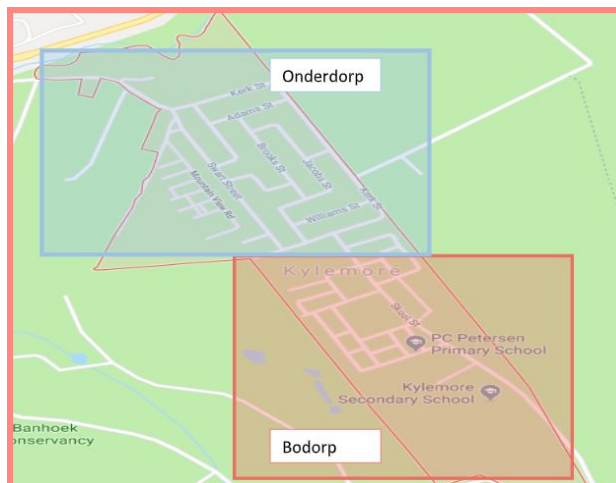


Figure 1. Map of Kylemore indicating geographical socio economic division of town into their respective local names. (Source: Google Maps, 2018).

It should thus be noted that this impact study will focus primarily on the residents of the Bo-dorp; with upliftment and volunteerism plans concentrated in this area.



KYLEMORE AT PRESENT

Although described as a previously disadvantaged tourist town, with a strong sense of community, the town is wrought with socioeconomic difficulties. Chief among these is the growing rate of adult unemployment, especially amongst males, reported to be as high as 60% by the Imbali WC website. This is predominantly due to the continued lifestyle of these residents as seasonal farm labourers, usually employed only during the harvest seasons of nearby farms. Subsequently unemployment peaks during the months of May and October, with few turning to personal enterprise for support. As a result, many in this community live in very low-income households and poverty.

This problem is compounded by the high rates of alcoholism. The issue of alcoholism has been attributed primarily to the lack of recreational facilities and limited social infrastructure within Kylemore. Shebeens have capitalised on this lack of entertainment and offer a cheaper and convenient alternative to travelling into neighbouring towns; particularly considering the working class community. In so doing however, these shebeens have improved the availability of alcohol and worsened the rate of consumption. This cycle of alcoholism has seemingly been passed on through generations, with many academic sources citing it as a modern destructive repercussion of the dop system introduced during the colonial era. It was a practice in which seasonal farm workers had their wages supplemented by alcohol, tobacco and bread; a practice that although abolished, was still practiced with great variation well into the 21st century. This has exacerbated the susceptibility of this community to alcohol abuse and dependency, and has made the community vulnerable to social problems linked to alcoholism such as domestic violence and crime.



Recently the town has also seen a surge in drug abuse cases, particularly crystal methamphetamine, known locally as “tik”. This is a problem blamed on external parties like drug dealers and gangs from the surrounding towns of Stellenbosch and Paarl, in addition to some individual groups within the Dwarsrivier valley. There have been numerous accounts of vulnerable youth and children, usually from the low-income farm worker households, being coerced by these groups into selling and using these drugs; being enticed by material luxury unavailable to them at home. A significant proportion of crime in Kylemore is thus a direct or indirect consequence of alcohol and drug abuse.

The population of Kylemore has been attributed to possess a remarkable amount of generic skill and individual talent. This however, is undercut by the prevalence of previously mentioned socioeconomic issues, a lack of any industry and limited employability. There is no employment opportunity for matriculants and school-leavers, and many do not possess the economic means to find and sustain employment in neighbouring towns. This is exacerbated by the lack of formal trade-skills training at high school, limiting average employability further. There is also little to no opportunity for graduates to further their education, as access to tertiary education is limited by financial constraints. As a result of these factors, in tandem with the previously mentioned socio economic problems, the youth of Kylemore are predisposed to disillusionment and subsequent unemployment in the job market. Many thus turn to the same seasonal agricultural labour that older generations of the community partake in, continuing the cycle of poverty.



For the community of Kylemore, there is clearly a major need to increase the employability levels of all the people in the area, through access to skilled and semi-skilled training; as well as the need to create local jobs, entrepreneurial proficiency and opportunities within the Dwarsrivier valley. That being said, it is important to reiterate the closeness of this community. Many of the residents living in Kylemore describe their people (particularly the Bo-land) as close-knit, and have a great source of pride in their community. As a result many of the senior residents of Kylemore have taken an initiative to help improve many of the social issues facing the community; with many drawing in fundraising for community outreach programs from the surrounding towns and NGO's. There are also numerous volunteerism opportunities for the local community to engage in, including clean-ups initiatives, clothing drives and feeding schemes for children and adults hosted by NGO's and local business owners.

One such organisation is Imbali Western Cape, which is a dedicated volunteerism program dedicated to fulfilling both the social and food needs of children in Kylemore, as well as their under-employed parents. Another great example of community initiative is the creation of a Kylemore Neighbourhood Watch that was created by a group of church elders in the community as a response to growing rates of crime and slow police reaction. Through continued community volunteerism and fundraising, this organisation has managed to transform from a group of untrained poorly equipped individuals to a recognised force of order working closely with police to protect the residents of Kylemore. This community it seems, are always ready and willing to respond to and make full use of created opportunities.



IN SUMMARY

Kylemore;

- Has a serious unemployment problem worsened by a great lack of industry in the area and highly limited employable trade-skills within the community.
- The youth of this town are caught in this cycle due to a lack of training in high-school, financial constraints in progressing education and job seeking respectively.
- There is no social infrastructure or recreational facilities for adults and youth in this town, further deepening disillusionment and social problems like alcohol and drug abuse.
- Has a population deeply in need of not only trade-skills training and employability, but healthy recreational facilities and initiatives
- The community has a spirit of closeness and is familiar with the concept of volunteerism and fundraising.

This impact study is thus being carried out on a community in great need of what Vollar is hoping to offer. Kylemore is thus a model community for this study. The implementation of Vollar in this and similar towns may serve as a cur to the socio economic problems that face the residents and may help diminish the prevalence of the poverty cycle in this community well into the future.