
FORUM ON IN-SITU INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING

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Gugulethu Comprehensive School, Cape Town

This is the first report from a series of public forums that will be held around Cape Town, aimed at bringing together government, professionals, academics and communities to discuss a wide range of important and pertinent issues relating to the development of poor communities.

The Partners



The **Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC)** is a nucleus of professionals and grassroots activists who think independently yet plan and act collectively. It is the hub of a new synergy between intellectual pioneers and collective action. CORC provides support to networks of urban and rural poor communities who mobilize themselves around their own resources and capacities. CORC's interventions are designed to enable rural and urban communities to learn from one another and to create solidarity and unity in order to be able to broker deals with formal institutions especially the State.



iKhayalami is a non-profit organisation whose primary aim is to upgrade informal settlements. It focuses on designing and manufacturing affordable housing solutions that are easy to transport, quick to erect and offer a range of opportunities for future upgrading. This is primarily an immediate solution to the crisis of inadequate shelter, but also provides an effective and rapid response in the event of township hazards such as fire and flooding.



The **UCT African Security & Justice Programme (ASJP)** actively explores ways to integrate effective mitigation and adaptation activities, related to climate change, with developmental benefits among poor constituencies. They aim to support poor entrepreneurs and the communities they work within and to promote environmentally beneficial outcomes that contribute to income generation, development and an improvement of welfare.

Joel Bolnick (Director of CORC) 'International Overview'

The idea of these forums is to bring community, government and professionals together to find solutions for the development of the poor. This is the first forum and it is hoped there will be many more. The topic of this inaugural forum is on 'informal settlement upgrading'.



Using Thailand as an example, this presentation looks at the types of community organisations that in other parts of the world are essential for informal settlement upgrading which can then help us look at South Africa through that lens.

Thailand, like South Africa, it is a middle income country yet the Thai government works closely with communities and provides subsidies for human settlements, not only for houses as in South Africa.

This is important because poor communities are best placed to know their own problems, what is most urgent for them in terms of development and are best placed to find their own solutions, with governments support. The Thai government has found that taking time to negotiate solutions with communities, rather than imposing development upon them, has resulted in a far easier, more cost effective and more successful solution to development.

Thus informal settlement upgrading refers to the incremental improvement of settlements, like in Thailand, where development occurs in stages and has been designed in a way that ensures that even the very poor have adequate access to settlement upgrading.

A vital step in the process is for that the Thai government shows a firm commitment to the poor by helping them gain security of tenure, on the land where they live, so they are not faced with the threat of eviction. This is followed by the provision of basic services that can later be built upon and upgraded.

After securing tenure ship, relevant stakeholders, including community leaders and government, are brought together where an outline for development is created. These meetings lead to the creation of joint committees, established to oversee development in an area and to ensure that the process is not about policy but about successful and genuine implementation.

CORC/SDI's sister organisation in Thailand is successful as it works with poor communities and the government in creating a space where these negotiations can take place effectively.



Here in South Africa, the government and communities certainly have the potential to create a space to negotiate and develop settlements, in partnership, a reason why this forum series has been created.

Ahmedi Vawda (National Department of Housing)
'The right to co-determine the city: A logical conclusion to BNG'



The nature of housing today is so varied that it needs to be responsive. You can't respond to different challenges unless you come to an agreement about the differing ways of doing it. Therefore Government must now build housing, not only in many different ways, but also much faster than in the past.

In reviewing housing performance over the past few years, quality has not been great, houses have not been distributed fairly enough and the housing system is generally not working efficiently. This means housing is in the wrong place and that the housing framework needs to be adapted.

Originally housing was built around four concepts:

1. to develop assets that can help people deal with poverty;
2. to build better communities and settlements;
3. to respond to demand, so that housing relates to what people want; and
4. that money should be available for housing for the people – money needs to come together better.

We have experienced rapid urbanisation yet there are not enough jobs for everyone. Government did not plan the infrastructure and did not prepare for this situation and as a result informal settlements have grown, creating the city from below, and these settlements should therefore become a party in the process of solving the problem.

There must be new ways of thinking around the way communities are planned and to develop new ways in negotiating agreements. Government now realises it is not able to do this on its own. Only when this works can the problem of housing be addressed.

Another issue relates to finances. To avoid the situation where housing is affordable but inadequate, or adequate but unaffordable; government needs new financial models and new ways to build and distribute houses. One way may be through the use of subsidies etc. - which SDI and the Federation of the Urban Poor are also looking at - but also in exploring ways to reduce the costs of development and provide novel mechanisms for financing.



In conclusion, there's a saying about building cities for all that includes the right of all communities to shape a city. People who want to invest in their development have the opportunity to partner in developing the city; to get involved in planning processes, all the way down to 'barefoot' levels.

Government realises there are many ways to deliver housing and it must get more involved in order to build the necessary institutional capacity to help deliver housing in new ways. Quoting from Harvey – "it's the right and responsibility of people in cities, wherever they are, to co-shape the way cities will work. It can only happen in a co-determined/shared way. There's no easy way to do this."

Shehaam Sims – Member of the Mayoral Committee in charge of Housing

We understand the objective of the meeting to be the creation of action towards solutions. The current housing waiting list show that up to 400,000 people have requested housing, yet the City of Cape Town has only been able to deal with about 6000 of these per year. The main hindrance is the availability of suitable land.

Local government, the housing menu includes breaking new ground with RDP housing, rental housing, social housing and gap housing with the latest addition being in-situ upgrading. This is realised through a collaboration between local, provincial and national government.

Informal settlements are a reality that cannot be wished away. In light of the backlogs, all housing needs cannot be dealt with at once. However, constitutional obligations require that something has to be done. After two years the City has begun incrementally providing sanitation, healthy water, lighting, storm-water and solid waste removal.



There are over 220 informal settlements in Cape Town. The City has managed to upgrade 60 of the 80 they had planned to do by the end of the financial year, and they're now beginning with settlements 90-120.

The challenge is whether or not the City is working with the people. They have a brand new model (not yet influenced by the Thai model), which is based upon the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrade (VPUU) model. The objective is not only to improve the quality of formal housing, but of all settlements across Cape Town.

The City is also looking at dealing with a new pilot site and will try to listen to what the people actually want. They have found that when they don't, they encounter many problems such as the high rate of vandalism in informal areas. For every R3 spent, R2 is to replace vandalised infrastructure and they hope that with a new process of development they can get the much needed buy-in and co-operation of the people.



Furthermore, informal areas are dense and must be de-densified so that necessary services can be put in place. If they had a steering committee that deals with each project, one drawn from the local community, that have common goals and trust, they could make decisions about what development is important for them. So 'please help me help you'.

Noahman “Blommie” Hendricks - Director Development Services, service delivery and integration

What Joel spoke about was very encouraging and it's clear that the key to development is in how you do it. It's not only about the built environment, it's about capacitating people to help themselves and improve their own environments.



The housing problem is too big for government to tackle alone and it is now looking at forming real partnerships with communities, and all other sectors, in order to turn informal settlements into genuine neighbourhoods. The City intends to test a number of approaches, to see what works best, in order to develop a comprehensive approach with regard to the upgrading of informal settlements.

Once new approaches are formalised and developed, the City needs to then 'upskill' itself in order to deliver at pace. They will need to restructure themselves to deliver services to the 20% of Cape Town's population who are living in informal settlements, in the same way that services are provided in Camps Bay and Bishops Court.

This is part of the new approach of dialogue and partnership that the City is trying to build upon.

Beth Biti – Shack Dwellers International

The government already realises that it's done things in the wrong way in the past. Policies that were meant to address the issues have not delivered on what really matters to the communities. Government must realise that the urban poor are suffering from the lack of foresight on the part of planners, otherwise they would not be living without electricity, water and sanitation.

Inasmuch as policies are necessary, implementation is far more important. Furthermore, the communities see the effects of unplanned settlements in their own local areas and not in figures that government quote. What is also important is that if people feel that they own and involved in the process of development, other issues will also be addressed.



If cities now plan to do in-situ planning, they must learn from the communities and not vice-versa. They must also recognise that people have differing needs and are not homogenous. Communities must be given space to solve issues before they can be heard as a 'common voice' as failure to discuss can lead easily to frustration and conflict.

There's an opening for communities to engage the City around what they feel works and not on the basis of government's understanding. Recognition alone is not enough and communities must come forward and say what they feel will work when. Dialogue is key.

OPEN SESSION

Questions

Mzwanele Zulu, leader of the Joe Slovo community (Langa)

I would like to highlight government's acknowledgement that they're doing things incorrectly and that engagement with people has not occurred in the past.

There is currently a case in the Constitutional Court around housing and if government had actually changed, it would have withdrawn its case. Therefore, its statement here is contradictory.

While development should be done in-situ, government shouldn't underestimate the people. They are asking people to get involved yet government is not engaging them. Many people in Joe Slovo don't have jobs. If people were involved, job creation would have occurred. It is trusted that there will be a positive change.



Answers

Ahmedi

The case is known as are the explanations. Government acknowledges that there are multiple ways to solving housing that includes litigation. Regarding the scope, there are also various ways to do this. If different parts of the community want things done in different ways, how do you reach agreement on this? Government acts in the way it thinks best represents the broader consensus. Ultimately each way produces new understandings of how best to do this. One of the judges in the Constitutional Court said you could have a win-lose situation, or a win-win situation. However the problem with the win-lose situation is that it's likely to result in a lose-lose situation.

Shehaam

The City recognises that it has not engaged with communities as it should have in the past. The context of the discussion was around informal settlements upgrading and would like this message conveyed to national government.

Questions

Melanie from Manenberg

Is there was any way of upgrading backyarders? There is also a problem with gap housing and why poor people should be crippled further by having to approach the banks for finance. They should give people land where they're going to build gap housing.

Zoliswa from Doornbach (Du Noon)

What is the relationship between the Departments of Housing and Land Affairs? She has stayed on private land for 15 years and has not received services. When they went to the municipality they were told that the land would be sold to others who wanted to build on the land. However they were also supposed to get a place in Diep River, but the municipality did not know anything about this.



Sheila from Site C (Khayelitsha)

They had been doing the savings scheme and had the responsibility of looking around for vacant pieces of land. They're approaching local committees for land but told that there's no land available. There is also a place by the river that is very unhealthy and unhygienic. The water is green and it's a very bad situation. She would like to hear something positive about them getting places to stay.

Woman from Europe

They know that winter is on the way. Regarding sanitation, the toilets are changed only once a week and the main problem is the water lying around their shack. You will always get water in your house and the children also play in it, which is not healthy. There are health problems – most people get TB including the children. There are also lots of flies, which is a really big problem. They would like the City to make a plan for them.

Answers

Shehaam

In response to the woman from Manenberg they intend to do other forms of housing besides gap housing, which some consider to be unaffordable. She didn't want to discourage people from doing this though, as owning a house is important. The upgrading won't create new opportunities, but will improve the condition of existing housing. Regarding backyarders – the policy does not deal with putting people in a different space; it just ensures that conditions on site improve. If were on the housing list, they would be considered, although the list is currently 400,000 long.

In response to the woman from Doornbach, plans are made long in advance and therefore if something is on the budget, it will remain on the budget.

Blommie

There is a common trend with all the questions – that there's a relationship barrier between all three spheres of government. It's an issue that needs to be resolved and legislation has been put in place. We are aware of the problems in Europe informal settlement.

Around the issue of winter, we have had our second winter readiness meeting already. The city is coordinating itself and is trying to implement various actions to reduce the risk of flooding. Flooding is a reality in the environment of informal settlements, due to the lack of planning and original layout. The 'island' in Site C is a major problem as it acts as an open sewer. However some people in 'Bordeaux' were relocated but then moved back. This was to do with making money and they won't be addresses again during winter. However they would look at cases of other people.

Ahmedi

It's obvious that there are different ways of understanding places and exchanging information between government and the community. The housing policy allows for informal upgrading in various ways and in-situ upgrading is just one way. Cities and provinces need to work out the nature and scale of the problem, and then come up with a plan and all three spheres have to work out how to work with communities.

Part of the answer is provided in the earlier presentation and response by the City. There must be housing plans and the commitment of money to them, and engagement with communities affected by the plans. Financing of plans is complex. There must be agreement on how the many ways can be resolved. It is important to remember that in-situ upgrading is not viable in certain areas.

Joel

It's been acknowledged that it takes government a long time to change the way it does things. There's a clear feeling that because government is not changing the way it does

things, there is an inability of government and the community to work together despite wanting to work together. However from all the comments and questions it appears that it also takes communities a long time to change the way they do things.

There is a saying in the international network that if you give away your problems, you shouldn't complain about the solutions. Professionals in this area should attempt to assist communities already trying to solve the problem themselves.

Another saying is that when two elephants fight, only the grass gets hurt. Here, the two elephants are government and the community, and the forum is the grass. In the area of in-situ upgrading of informal settlements, the forum hopes to create a space for community and government to discuss these issues



Comments

- Somebody from Site C said that development that had started in 2000 was still not finished, and that there were no services. She asked how long this would take.
- Someone from Site B said that some people had been taken for relocation while others were left there. They had no electricity. They had tried to negotiate with Eskom, the municipality and even Zille's office. The municipality didn't come back to them and Eskom needed money upfront.
- Someone from Philippi said they're staying next to the road with no electricity. They're told they can't get electricity because they're next to the road.
- Someone from Manenberg said he thinks government is willing to listen. He said the problem of the entire community is around electricity. There are tensions within the community, which will prolong things, but they need to stand together as one.
- Someone from Khayelitsha said they're staying on private land. They can't get taps or electricity because they're told the land is private. She asked whether in-situ upgrading would apply to them if they're on private land.
- Someone from Joe Slovo said government is not engaging with communities. Everything should be democratic, but it's not. Things are being politicised while development should be brought to the people. The bucket system is still being used, which is not good for humanity. Government must assist communities who ask them for things.
- Another woman said the City should talk to the people about what they want to do. Government must do something. The communities do get organised. They're unemployed (due to their involvement in organisations) but they are then told that there's no land available. When land is available, it's then sold to the private sector.

In closing

This is the first forum but that there would be many others. The various organisations would be contacted and it is hoped that they would attend in the future. The aim of the forum was to bring communities and government together and to provide more inclusion to those who are poor and excluded.

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