



TOWARDS GREATER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING: A CASE STUDY FROM SLOVO PARK, JOHANNESBURG

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According to official statistics, over 2.1 million households in South Africa lack adequate housing. Many of these households are situated in informal settlements, which range from the partially formalised—with some form of tenure security and access to basic water and sanitation services—to the extremely marginalised, with no security of tenure and little access to basic services. Since 2009, the South African government has ostensibly focused its national housing programme on the in situ incremental upgrading of well-located informal settlements.



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THE KEY policy here is the revised Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP), contained in the National Housing Code. Further, the accreditation of capacitated municipalities with housing functions means that national and provincial government control over housing delivery is shifting to the local level. The official target is to upgrade 400 000 households living on well-located land by 2014 (Department of Human Settlements 2010:14).¹

The focus on *in situ* upgrading is a welcome shift from the 'eradication' and 'elimination' discourse and practice of the preceding five years. A major precondition for achieving successful *in situ* upgrading is community participation—as is the case with most legislation, government policy and programmes. Indeed, the South African National Planning Commission's *National Development Plan, 2030* highlights the need to shift to a development

paradigm that promotes the development of capabilities, the creation of opportunities and the participation of all citizens. The plan also highlights the importance of halting the practice of building houses on poorly located land and shifting 'greater resources to informal-settlement upgrading, provided that they are in areas close to jobs' (National Planning Commission 2011:33). The incremental upgrading of informal settlements is almost inherently participatory—or at least it should be. The reality, however, is that meaningful community participation in socio-economic development remains elusive in South Africa, as highlighted by the 2010/2011 publication on the state of local governance (GGLN 2011) and in statements by high-level politicians (GCIS 2011). Community protests occurring throughout the country, and the increasing number of cases coming before the courts, often relate to poor or non-existent consultation with communities around local development.²

In 2010, the Slovo Park Community Development Forum (SPCDF) approached the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) to investigate the non-implementation of a housing project that had been promised to the community of Slovo Park informal settlement since 1994, and to compel the government to upgrade the settlement. Over the years, community leaders had compiled a detailed history of the settlement, and recorded much of their correspondence with government departments and politicians. These included numerous memoranda and community resolutions as well as documents that had been generated as part of an official process that began in 2005 to upgrade the settlement, but which, six years on, had still not materialised.

This paper examines the attempts of the SPCDF to bring about development at Slovo Park informal settlement, the barriers to participation it has faced over the years, and the steps it is now taking outside

of formal processes to proactively engage in upgrading the settlement. The first section provides some background on the Slovo Park settlement and summarises the community's attempts at engagement with development processes since 1994. This is followed by an examination of developments at Slovo Park during 2010 and 2011. The conclusion highlights several fault lines around planning and participation in upgrading, drawing on lessons that are relevant to Slovo Park and similar communities across South Africa.

THE BACKGROUND TO SLOVO PARK

Slovo Park informal settlement is situated in Johannesburg's Region G, next to the Nancefield Industrial Area between Nancefield, Eldorado Park and Bushkoppies. According to an informal survey conducted by the community in 2011, over 1 600 households and 5 000 people live in the settlement. It was first established during the early 1990s by people seeking a place to live closer to their jobs, and has since grown considerably. In terms of access to basic services, the settlement contains 1 050 ventilated pit latrines which were installed at each stand in 2005, plus four communal standpipes per informal street. Recently, the community began installing household water connections for themselves. The land on which the settlement is built is publicly-owned, and according to the City of Johannesburg's *Regional Spatial Development Framework 2010/2011* (RSDF), Slovo Park is in Category 1 of its informal settlement formalisation programme: that is, it has been earmarked for upgrading.

The 2010/2011 RSDF estimates the number of households in Slovo Park at 1 052. It notes that the settlement is located next to the Nancefield Industrial Area and that low-cost housing and informal

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settlements are competing with businesses for land. The RSDF notes that the area's informal settlements are located on prime vacant land and goes on to say that 'geotechnical studies have revealed dolomite in the area. Thus half of this sizable informal settlement (Slovo Park) will have to be relocated, as housing can only be provided for approximately 700 units on the developable land available' (City of Johannesburg 2010:78).³ Among a list of key issues and priorities for the area as a whole, the RSDF includes 'the relocation of Slovo Park Informal settlement residents due to dolomite and subsequent use of the land' and the need to 'identify the availability of suitable land to fast-track the relocation of Slovo Park settlement from the high-risk dolomitic land' (City of Johannesburg 2010:125, 129).

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND LEADERSHIP

Throughout the country, informal settlements are routinely organised by informal committees or development forums. These settlement-level structures are usually democratically elected by the community and play an important role in the day-to-day functioning of informal settlements. They provide proof of residence to community members for various administrative purposes, regulate the influx of newcomers and the building of shacks in the settlement, interact with the local police around crime prevention, form partnerships with local businesses around employment opportunities, and engage with local ward councillors around service delivery.

Slovo Park's SPCDF is a well-organised and well-established forum which has pushed for upgrading of the settlement for over a decade. Elections are held annually and candidates can stand for a number of different portfolios including: health; sports, arts and culture; economic development and savings; housing; local economic development; safety and security; environment; youth; women; communication; poverty; and education. There are 36 representatives in total—four people from each block in the settlement are elected.

At the time of writing, SPCDF representatives supported different political parties, and according to the chairperson at the time, Mohau Melani, political affiliations are not seen as important. Rather, it is what the people want that is most important. Melani was first elected as chairperson in 2007 and also serves as an elected office-bearer in the Johannesburg structure of the Informal Settlement Network.⁴ In 2009, Melani ran in the municipal by-elections as an African National Congress (ANC) candidate for ward councillor; however a Democratic Alliance (DA) candidate won. During the 2011 local government elections, Slovo Park was demarcated into a newly created ward, which was won by an ANC candidate.

Community meetings in Slovo Park are well attended, and it appears that there is buy-in from the majority of the community for the SPCDF. For example, the community offers financial support in the form of ad hoc donations when needed (for example, to hire busses for community members to attend marches). The elected representatives receive no payment. There are undoubtedly internal power dynamics and different agendas at play, including political ones. However, there is a genuine sense that the SPCDF has a mandate to improve the lives of those living at Slovo Park, and this is the driving force behind the efforts of the forum—not least

‘additional land must be identified to accommodate the surplus families’ (iNtatakusa Consulting 2005:29). The report describes how the availability of vacant land for development and relocation of excess families is a development constraint and that ‘there is vacant land adjacent that should be investigated.’ The study concludes that the remaining households would have to be relocated to developments on vacant land nearby, and suggests a number of options.

consulting firm, who told them that he and his team were at an advanced stage in the formal process of establishing a township at the settlement, and that this was due to conclude in early July 2007. He stated that geotechnical studies were still to be conducted on the area, and that these were to take place in May 2007. The community was told that development would proceed by September 2007, but that the number of houses being built would be reduced from 950 to 821 because of dolomitic conditions in the area. By July 2007, the community had heard nothing further about the geotechnical study, supposedly the last hurdle to development, and decided to protest. In the early hours of 10 July, Slovo Park residents blockaded the N12 highway near Eldorado Park, protesting about the lack of water, electricity and houses.⁷

In August 2007, a new consultant from Arcus Gibb approached the community, and said she had taken over from her colleague, and was extending the deadline for development to occur from September 2007 to November 2007. She further stated that the number of houses to be built would be 820. Shortly after this, yet another consultant arrived and told the community that only 660 houses would be built. It is understandable that at this point frustration levels at the settlement were extremely high.

On 11 September 2007, the community marched on the Union Buildings in Pretoria to ‘introduce the community to President Mbeki’ and to call for electricity, water and sewerage at the settlement. They presented a memorandum that includes long- and short-term demands for: the improvement of service delivery; the installation of long-overdue electricity access points; the installation of permanent taps in individual yards, flush toilets, tarred roads and pavements; the building of 2 500 five-room houses; and recognition of the township as a formal settlement (SPCDF 2007).

Despite the numerous further promises by politicians and government officials, no concrete development took place. While official processes involving housing development are inevitably protracted, the community leadership was not satisfied with the excuses offered, and mobilised in various ways to push for development. Over the years, the SPCDF has lobbied their local ward councillors, the MMC for Housing, MEC for Housing, the mayor, the leadership of the local ANC branch, local parliamentary constituency offices, local members of parliament, the premier of the province as well as the president of South Africa.

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In early 2008, the SPCDF continued to engage with various government officials, high level figures in the ANC and technical professionals. There were overt expressions of dissatisfaction and disappointment with the ANC and political deployees to the executive council (MEC) and the mayoral committee (MMC), who had failed to ensure development at Slovo Park despite all the promises made to the community. The community leadership used both subtle and overtly political 'scare tactics' to lobby for development at the settlement. In April 2008, the community marched on the offices of the executive mayor and the speaker, and the SPCDF handed over a petition and a Memorandum of Accountability stating how their constitutional rights were being ignored and demanding socio-economic rights and the recognition of what they have called Nancefield Township (SPCDF 2008).

Throughout this fraught period, a formal process was, in fact, underway, and between 2008 and 2009 an independent environmental impact assessment (EIA) was conducted at the settlement (Nemai Consulting was appointed in July 2007 to undertake this process). A number of community meetings were convened with the consultants as part of the EIA's public participation process, and minutes of these meetings clearly show the disjuncture between the community and the consultants. While members of the community raised issues relating to the history of the project, the number of houses needed, the timeframes and false promises they had been given, the consultants could not sufficiently engage with these issues (see Tissington 2011:38–45). At a meeting held in 2009, community members raised questions around why only 660 houses were to be built, where the remainder of the community would be housed, when building would commence, what other facilities were planned etc. Nemai Consulting seemed unable to engage with these

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questions, and referred many queries to the ward councillor. The SPCDF then expressed its confusion as to what the EIA was supposed to achieve as there had been research conducted before at the settlement, and they questioned whether Nemai Consulting would investigate what happened to the promise of 950 houses so as to 'close the gap between what had been promised for the last 13 years and their appointment as consultants'.⁸ In June 2009, Nemai Consulting made public their 'Environmental Impact Assessment Report: Slovo Park Housing Development'. Two potential layouts of the settlement were proposed, with the preferred and most up-to-date option yielding 629 stands (Nemai Consulting 2009:30–31).

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Houses, whenever they arrive, will be a bonus for the community' (SPCDF 2009b). Throughout 2009, the SPCDF attempted to raise the issue of development at the settlement with various politicians and government officials. In early December 2009, Slovo Park residents again turned to protest after the housing MMC failed to attend a meeting about development at the settlement.⁹

interventions are required to rectify the situation, which were not budgeted for initially, and are not provided for in the subsidy amounts. Bulk sewerage is a municipal responsibility of the City of Johannesburg. Thus, the Gauteng housing department has to find a mechanism to fund this, and until these bulk infrastructure issues are resolved, the township application has been suspended.¹¹

Interestingly, new hope was given to the SPCDF when Slovo Park was demarcated as a new ward after the 2011 local government elections. The ward was then won by an ANC candidate who lives in the area and, according to Melani, understands the plight of Slovo Park and the history of the Devland Extension 27 housing project. It appears that the councillor is onboard with the forum's efforts to seek legal assistance to compel the province to upgrade the settlement *in situ*.

According to the project manager, investigations were done into the possibility of purchasing land adjacent to the settlement to relocate excess households from Slovo Park, but it was discovered that there is a 100-year floodline on this land which makes it unsuitable for development. In terms of the Eldorado Park development, it appears that Eldorado Park residents are unwilling to accommodate Slovo Park residents in their area, and thus this option is still in a very early planning phase.

DEVELOPMENTS AT SLOVO PARK IN 2010 AND 2011

Indeed, over the years, the SPCDF has engaged tirelessly with politicians and formal structures to try and secure the upgrading of their settlement. According to them, this approach, a political 'behind closed doors' one, has yielded few results. In 2010, the Gauteng housing department told the community that due to a number of problems that had arisen during the EIA process and geotechnical investigations, the layout plan had to be amended and the size of the development reduced still further to just 575 stands; and that the remaining households would have to be relocated to a development at Eldorado Park.¹⁰ According to the project manager at Arcus Gibb, unforeseen planning and design issues, in particular, problems with the bulk sewerage connection are still stalling development at Slovo Park. According to him, costly

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Indeed, the SPCDF has been very proactive in soliciting assistance from various 'professionals' outside the state and formal structures. In addition to engaging legal NGOs around securing access to interim services at the settlement and pushing for upgrading, it also partnered with the Community Organisation Resource Centre to secure master's students from the University of Pretoria's architecture department to research and design an upgrading and development plan for the settlement,

and to build a community hall there. In July 2010, the residents of Slovo Park ‘after 3 years of trying to engage Provincial Government about the provision of water, flush toilets and electricity realised that the State was not going to aid them’ (SA SDI Alliance 2010). The community decided to ‘help itself’. They conducted a skills audit and gathered all the plumbers in the community to assist with installing household water connections. Community members organised themselves into street clusters and worked out how they would pay for the main pipe and the fittings required to install household connections, as well as how they would reimburse the plumbers for their time. According to the SDI, of the 1 152 sites, approximately 1 050 have a standpipe on their site connected to the main water supply through this ‘self-help’ process (SA SDI Alliance 2010). SPCDF have since continued working with students and others on mapping the settlement using a GIS system, and are developing alternative plans for infrastructure and *in situ* upgrading, which they hope will tie in with planned litigation.

FAULT LINES AROUND PLANNING AND PARTICIPATION IN UPGRADING

The spider’s web that is the Slovo Park case study highlights the serious gaps and deficits in official planning processes, which in turn raise serious questions about the ability of even well-organised, cohesive and mobilised communities to participate in the upgrading of informal settlements. A top-down, consultant-driven approach managed by the provincial government — with little to no engagement between local communities and their elected representatives — is a recipe for disaster. The Slovo Park story further highlights the following key issues:

- * There is a lack of coordination and alignment

between provincial and local government around settlement upgrading.

- * Temporary, insecure situations become permanent at settlements and residents are unable to consolidate their living situations and invest in improvements.
- * Local government structures are failing to use resources, knowledge and expertise available within settlements, which are vital to upgrading processes such as enumeration, re-blocking etc.
- * Promises that remain unfulfilled (such the ‘950 houses’), the persistent lack of communication to explain why these promises have been broken or to commit to new goals, combined with the failure to directly address perceptions of corruption, all lead to a serious break down in trust between communities and government.
- * Development targets shift continually, with little or no explanation from the responsible authorities, and occur in a context of a general lack of communication from government. Transparency in processes and timelines is necessary, and this information must be made available to community leaders and members.
- * Community expectations are shifting: from a demand for housing to demands for basic services and tenure security, which aligns with the government’s current agenda on incremental upgrading.
- * Protest is increasingly likely when politicians and government officials make empty promises to communities year after year.

These issues are neither new, nor specific to this particular settlement. Throughout South Africa poor communities, often organised and proactive, struggle to access well-located urban land, decent services, security of tenure and the means to consolidate their informal housing into something better (see World

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Bank 2008). The Slovo Park case points to the following imperatives:

- * to reform the urban land system and improve integrated planning
- * to develop and implement pro-poor land strategies
- * to push for *in situ* informal settlement upgrading and incremental settlement
- * to pursue meaningful participation by communities and provide them with greater support and access to information
- * to promote community-based development
- * to harness the energy, expertise and 'social capital' of community members and leaders in development processes.

The Slovo Park example provides clear proof of community action and agency with respect to planning, enumeration, skills audit, water connections, litigation etc. This is not a passive community, waiting for development. In reality there is very little evidence of the apathy often blamed on communities who are seen as waiting for development to be delivered to them. There is a need for sustainable partnerships that can help to expedite development and ensure the improvement of living conditions for the poor during the interim periods leading to larger infrastructural development. This is what the Slovo Park residents are now trying to facilitate.

Given the government's target of upgrading 400 000 households on well-located land by 2014, the myriad barriers to achieving scaled-up and sustainable development need to be seriously and programmatically addressed. A different paradigm—complete with different laws, processes, timelines, priorities, attitudes and outcomes—needs to be developed to achieve the ambitious and imperative task of upgrading informal settlements and improving the socio-economic conditions of those who live in them. The following recommendations are put forward in an effort to assist stakeholders to achieve the necessary paradigm shift and to encourage community participation in local and provincial government:

- * Proper feasibility studies of informal settlements and the land on which they are situated should be expeditiously undertaken by local government (assisted by provincial government where necessary); the active participation of communities in this process should be encouraged wherever viable, for example, in the enumeration of households.
- * Access to interim services in informal settlements—particularly water, sanitation and refuse removal—is already mandated in legislation and policy; these services should be provided with the participation of community members and representatives.
- * Local government needs to offer greater recognition of and support to community structures; similarly, government needs to act with integrity and understanding when dealing with community forums and communities that have been sent from pillar to post for years regarding improvements to their living conditions.

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- ✳ Roles and responsibilities around land-use planning and regulation, integrated-development planning, housing programmes, and the provision of services, etc, need to be defined, rationalised and communicated to community leaders and social movements in a way that is accessible and facilitates further community participation in development processes.
 - ✳ One-way, top-down communication with communities should be avoided, particularly when external consultants are involved (during EIA processes, for example).
 - ✳ Plans that are not inclusive and do not accommodate all those living in settlements are not rational and are unlikely to be sustainable, and should be reformulated in consultation with communities—when too few opportunities are afforded to communities, corruption and graft around the allocation of housing occurs. This results in mistrust of government and can lead to violence.

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NOTES

- ¹ This target is included in the Outcome 8 delivery agreement on Sustainable Human Settlements and Improved Quality of Household Life (Department of Human Settlements 2010). Outcome 8 is one of 12 delivery agreements based on national priorities set by government in early 2010.
- ² See *Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA and Another v Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and Others* [2009] ZACC 31. www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2009/31.pdf. Retrieved 26 January 2012; *Ntombentsha Beja and Others v Premier of the Western Cape and Others* 2011 (10) BCLR 1077 (WCC) (29 April 2011). <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAWCHC/2011/97.html>. Retrieved 26 January 2012; and *Residents of Joe Slovo Community, Western Cape v Thubelisha Homes and Others* [2009] ZACC 16. www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2009/16.pdf. Retrieved 26 January 2012.

- ³ Dolomite is the geological phenomena of sedimentary rock under land, which can result in the formation of sinkholes, making development both risky and expensive. About 25% of Gauteng's surface area consists of dolomite land, with much of this occurring in Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni (see Storie, 2011).
- ⁴ The Informal Settlement Network (ISN) forms part of the South African SDI (Shack/Slum Dwellers International) Alliance, together with the Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC), the uTshani Fund and FEDUP. <http://www.sasdialliance.org.za/blog/>.
- ⁵ According to the City of Johannesburg's Draft Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (Revision 2009/10), Slovo Park is on the list of the Gauteng department of housing's new Capex projects for 2009/2010, and has been allocated a medium-term budget of R14 832 00 (City of Johannesburg 2009:325).
- ⁶ For more on the problem of corruption in housing delivery in South Africa, see Rubin (2011).
- ⁷ See Lenasia Protests Turn Violent. *IOL News*. 10 July 2007. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/lenasia-protests-turn-violent-1.361333>. Retrieved 3 October, 2011.
- ⁸ Information contained in a dossier for 2007–2010, provided by Mohau Melani (copy in possession of the author).
- ⁹ See Burning Tyres Used to Block Roads. *IOL News*. 7 December 2009. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/burning-tyres-used-to-block-roads-1.466937>. Retrieved 3 October 2011.
- ¹⁰ This information comes from the minutes of a meeting of representatives from the Legal Resources Centre, Arcus Gibb and the Gauteng provincial housing department on 30 September 2010.
- ¹¹ Telephonic interview with Arcus Gibb project manager, Vusi Radebe, on 19 April 2011.