

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE N2 GATEWAY HOUSING PROJECT IN LANGA/JOE SLOVO TOWNSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The principle of community participation entails that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. The implication of this is that the public's contribution can influence decisions taken as well as outcomes of those decisions. This study was conducted in Langa (Joe Slovo) community in Cape Town, Western Cape Province. Langa (Joe Slovo) is the largest informal settlement in South Africa and has been the focal point of one of Government's largest and most well-publicised housing delivery initiatives, known as the N2 Gateway Housing Project. This article is based on a project which is intergovernmental in scope as it calls upon each of the three spheres of government in South Africa to cooperate with each other in order to address public housing needs as part of the effort towards poverty alleviation in the country. The project also employed public-private partnership as a strategy vis-à-vis outsourcing project management, construction contracting, and oversight to a Section 21 (non-profit) company, Thubelisha Homes. Within the context of the N2 Gateway Housing Project, the article interrogates the effectiveness of approaches initiated by Government to deliver low-cost housing to low-income communities, and the extent to which community participation featured in the project.

INTRODUCTION

Community participation (CP) as a modality of development is often misunderstood and incorrectly applied. The danger is that when CP is ignored or incorrectly applied, the result is often an angry and frustrated community; but if correctly considered, it's greatest potential contribution to development relates, *inter alia*, to the fact that it is essential for ensuring success in the implementation of public projects.

In 1994, when it transitioned from apartheid to democratic rule, South Africa inherited a monumental national housing crisis, which was fundamentally complicated by a long-standing culture of a lack of popular and community participation in governance and service delivery. Post-1994, newly adopted principles of democratic participation and civic responsibility made local government a key focal point for development initiatives. The new South African government thus crafted policies and legislation to strengthen grassroots participation by introducing the concept of 'developmental' local government (see the 1995 White Paper on Local Government, and Chapters 2 and 7 of the 1996 *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*). Local government, as the sphere of government closest to the people, was to prioritise community participation by working closely with citizens and communities to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs in order to improve the quality of their lives.

This article analyses the challenges of community participation, with specific reference to the N2 Gateway Housing Project. The N2 Gateway Housing Project was undertaken in March 2005 by the three spheres of government – national, provincial and local. The project aimed at replacing the informal settlement of Joe Slovo, which is along the N2 highway and adjacent to Langa township, with formal houses and flats. This project was earmarked as a pilot project of the Comprehensive Housing Plan for South Africa, which was adopted by the Cabinet on 1 September 2004. The point of departure of this article is an interrogation of the effectiveness of government-initiated and stakeholder-run development projects with specific reference to the N2 Gateway Housing Project, and the role played by the community in this project.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE STUDY

The methodology and research design of this study is qualitative. In addition to a secondary literature survey, the case study approach was used as it allows the researcher to explore a bounded system (or multiple bounded systems) over time, through detailed in-depth study involving multiple sources of information (Merriam, 2009:43). The case study approach offers an attractive way of using a variety of research methods to produce a rounded portrayal of an identified subject. Case studies can be bounded by and focused on, for example, a marriage, a family, a work place and a small community.

Special features that define the case study approach are that it is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic, and can be expected to bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience or confirm what is already known (Merriam, 2009:43-44). Triangulation in data collection was applied in this study by use of interviews, questionnaires, a literature review and observation. Thus, one-on-

one interviews with local government officials, the project steering committee, and the project team were employed. Secondly, structured questionnaires were used with intended beneficiaries of the project. Lastly, secondary sources of literature and the personal observations of the researcher were employed in an attempt to lend veracity to information provided by both set of respondents.

In terms of sampling, community members were selected randomly for participation in the study, and thereafter clustered into various strata (including age, duration of residence in the community, employment status, etc.) to facilitate analysis of the data. As for government officials, non-probability purposive sampling was employed given the small number that participated in this group of respondents.

N2 GATEWAY HOUSING PROJECT: LANGA AND JOE SLOVO COMMUNITIES

What follows immediately hereunder is an exposition of the establishment and brief history of Langa and Joe Slovo communities. Also, a brief explanation on the first two phases of the project is provided (let it here be noted also that at the time of writing it is a yet to be completed, ongoing project). And lastly, we present a brief summary and discussion of the findings of the study on which the current article is based.

Brief exposition on the establishment of Langa and Joe Slovo communities

Langa was established in 1901 during the colonial era, named after Langelibalele, the royal chief of Amahlubi. Similar to Khayelitsha, Langa is one of the many areas in South Africa that were designated for black Africans during the apartheid era. It is the oldest of these suburbs in Cape Town and was the location of strong resistance to colonial era apartheid. In 1873, a tribal chief and renowned rainmaker, Langelibalele, was imprisoned on Robben Island. Various prominent people fought for his release and he was subsequently held in custody on a farm on the site of the present day suburb of Pinelands.

Langa, which adjoins Pinelands, honours this folk hero as it was developed in 1898 on the land known as "Langelibalele's Location". Langa is bordered by Jan Smuts Drive on the west, Settlers' Way on the south, and Vanguard Drive (N7 freeway on the east) and is served by Langa Railway Station. As Langa became overcrowded, newcomers to the area created an informal settlement adjacent to Langa that was named Joe Slovo (see Figure 1 below).

The Joe Slovo settlement took shape in the early 1990s and is situated where the N2 highway starts. The land on which the settlement is built is owned by the City of Cape Town. As is the case with many other informal settlements, it was named after former housing minister and anti-apartheid activist, Joe Slovo. With over 20

000 residents, Joe Slovo is one of the largest informal settlements in South Africa (Mnguni, 2010:45).

Brief background to the housing crisis in Langa/Joe Slovo

During the apartheid era, security operatives forcibly evicted Joe Slovo residents and destroyed their dwellings. Although residents returned and rebuilt homes post-1994, it was only after a fire swept through the settlement in 2002, destroying residential homes, that the local City Council endeavoured to provide tap water, toilets, refuse removal, drainage and electricity.

Figure 1: Joe Slovo Settlement



Adapted from the Department of Local Government and Housing, 2009

In 2005 another fire in the Joe Slovo settlement destroyed the homes of 996 families. The victims of the fire were informed that they could not rebuild their homes, but that they would be included in the N2 Gateway Housing Project. The project was formally launched a month after the fire. In 2006, Joe Slovo residents who were hesitant to move were threatened with forced removal to make way for the Housing Project (Development Action Group, 2008:357).

When phase one of the N2 Gateway Project had been completed, the Government ordered the eviction of the remaining 20 000 shack dwellers to temporary relocation areas (TRAs) in Delft. En masse, Joe Slovo residents opposed government's order that they be forcibly removed, claiming that the government was not getting rid of slums, but merely moving them to Delft, where there were no jobs, few schools and a higher rate of crime. It was reported that residents who had willingly moved to Delft after the fire in 2005 had lost their jobs because they could not afford transportation into Cape Town, since there was no railway line to Delft. After a Cape High Court ruling in favour of the Government, residents of Joe Slovo appealed the decision to evict them and took the case to the South African

Constitutional Court (Development Action Group, 2008:357). The Constitutional Court upheld the High Court decision ruling that the evictions were justifiable and was neither in violation of the 1996 Constitution, nor the *Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act* (Act 19 of 1998). The manner in which the evictions were to take place was, however, in violation of the Constitution. Key among these conditions is that suitable alternative accommodation was to be provided to evicted tenants (*Constitutional Court of South Africa*, 2009).

Breaking New Ground (2004) Programme and the N2 Gateway Housing Project

From 2002 to 2003, the Department of Housing (DoH) embarked on a comprehensive review of the then National Housing Programme after having recognised a number of its unintended consequences. As an outcome of the review, in 2004 Government launched a new initiative called Breaking New Ground (BNG), which was meant to be a comprehensive plan managed by the Department of Sustainable Human Settlements. The main purpose of the plan was to shift the focus of the housing policy from the mere delivery of vast numbers of houses towards creating sustainable human settlements. More specifically, the housing problems that the policy targeted included peripheral residential development, poor quality products and settlements, lack of community participation, a limited secondary low-cost housing market, corruption and maladministration, a slowdown in delivery, under spent budgets, limited or decreasing public sector participation, an increasing housing backlog, and the continued growth of informal settlements (Department of Housing, 2008).

The review process aimed at providing a new policy direction and establishing a research team to inform and support policy decision-making within the housing programme (Department of Housing, 2008). This new plan was to redirect and enhance existing mechanisms to move towards more responsive and effective delivery. The new human settlements plan reinforces the vision of the Department of Housing, which is to promote a nonracial, integrated society through the development of sustainable human settlements and quality housing. Within this broader vision, the Department committed to meeting the following specific objectives (Department of Housing, 2008):

- Accelerating the delivery of housing as a key strategy for poverty alleviation
- Utilising provision of housing as a major job creation strategy
- Ensuring property can be accessed by all as an asset for wealth creation and empowerment
- Leveraging growth in the economy
- Combating crime, promoting social cohesion and improving quality of life for the poor
- Supporting the functioning of the entire single residential property market in

order to reduce duality within the sector by breaking the barriers between the first economy residential property boom and the second economy slump

- Utilising housing as an instrument for the development of sustainable human settlements, in support of spatial restructuring.

The approach in Breaking New Ground (BNG) promised to enhance the ability of citizens to negotiate more effectively the value of the home as an asset and a settlement with its related location and degree of integration into urban and rural economies. This means that people living in poverty will be able to build social and physical assets, thus establishing housing as an economic instrument once transferred to beneficiaries.

The N2 Gateway Project was intended to make a substantial impact on the lives of more than 25 000 households living in informal housing within the City of Cape Town, while simultaneously testing and developing the principles contained in the BNG programme. This Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements contained the formalisation of detailed housing standards, programmes, codes and related funding regimes.

The role of Thubelisha Homes in the N2 Gateway Housing Project

Thubelisha Homes, as the government's housing agent, had been mandated to implement low-income housing schemes. Thubelisha Homes' objectives were to undertake construction of affordable housing and related services, to provide project management services and to manage rental housing. In order to meet these objectives, Thubelisha Homes undertook the following:

- Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP)
- Unblocking of housing projects affected by inflation and other related factors
- Fast tracking housing solutions for people living in areas of stress by using the emergency housing circumstances programme (transitional housing).

In 2005, Thubelisha Homes was tasked to become involved in the highly contentious N2 Gateway Project in Cape Town, as the project manager and implementing agent for the Western Cape Department of Housing (Thubelisha Homes *Annual Report* 2005/2006). Thubelisha's contribution to the project's outcome is, however, mired in controversy. By May 2008 Thubelisha Homes declared to Parliament's portfolio committee on housing, that they had essentially reached the stage of being technically insolvent. In this regard, rather than attaining their planned and projected profits of R49.5 million since the start of the Project, they had instead made a loss of R67.5 million (DHS 2010). The fact that many of Thubelisha Homes' other goals and objectives were never met is reflected in the backlog in the development of approximately 16 000 homes and/or stands by May 2008 (which in turn reflects that of the 38 407 homes planned, only 22 717 were delivered). The company had handed over to clients only 2 889 of the 5 422

built houses. Its target had been to hand over 16 290 (Makinana, 2008). By the fiscal year ended March 2010, the Department of Human Settlements began the process of winding down and terminating the operations of Thubelisha, while also implementing measures to have said operations taken over by the Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA) (Department of Human Settlements, 2009-10).

Phase 1 of the N2 Gateway Housing Project

The N2 Gateway Housing Project was intended to demonstrate a move away from the approach by government of providing households in informal settlements with freestanding, freehold title RDP houses. Instead, the objective was to provide a range of higher-density affordable rental housing options on well-located land, targeting communities that had been adversely affected by unacceptable social conditions. The targeted communities in the Western Cape are specifically those living in informal settlements such as Joe Slovo, New Rest, Gxagxa, Kanana, Boys Town, Lusaka, Vukuzenzele, Barcelona, Delft 7-9, Delft Symphony and District Six, and include backyard dwellers from Langa, Gugulethu, Bonteheuwel, Bokmakierie and Nyanga (Development Action Group, 2008 357).

However, to build units in Joe Slovo (Phase 1), scores of households who were living in informal structures (shacks) were removed to clear space for construction. They were sent to live in open spaces between shacks in the wider Joe Slovo area, with the prospect of returning to occupy the new formal housing units. However, their return was not assured due to the significantly higher costs associated with government's plan for higher-density (social) housing as provided in the N2 Gateway Project (Phase 1) as compared with contractor-built RDP houses or public rental housing. Subsidies allocated for social housing are approximately three times that of freestanding units and monthly rentals are significantly higher than public rental housing, making it generally unaffordable for households from this informal settlement community (Development Action Group, 2008:357).

Construction of Phase 1 meant most former residents of the N2 informal settlements were displaced to peripheral areas such as Delft and Bardale, some 25km or more from the city. Delft is a highly dysfunctional and socially toxic environment, with inadequate community facilities, hardly any formal commercial and economic activities, and an expensive and largely inaccessible public transport system. The N2 Gateway Project (Phase 1) was beset with technical and political difficulties and seemed set to demonstrate some of the fundamental problems associated with housing delivery in South Africa (Development Action Group, 2008: 357).

Project Finances (Phase 1)

When the N2 Gateway national pilot project was launched in 2005 to provide

22 000 houses to informal settlement dwellers and backyarders along the N2 freeway from Langa to the Cape Town International Airport, it was announced that the overall project would cost R2.3 billion. Local government funding, top-up funding, donor funding from the Social Housing Foundation and institutional housing subsidies from national government were to be used. For Phase 1 of the project in Joe Slovo, subsidies were in the region of R75 000 per unit. However, when the units were completed in early 2006, actual costs per unit had reached approximately R110 000. After the completion of Phase 1, the overall cost of the project had increased to R3 billion, which was R700 million more than the costs projected in 2005 (Development Action Group, 2008: 359).

Phases 2 and 3 of the N2 Gateway Housing Project

Despite the obvious dissatisfaction with the execution of Phase 1 of the N2 Gateway Project and its failure to accommodate a sufficient number of residents from the Joe Slovo settlement, Phase 2 was launched in June 2006. It was also announced at this time that Phase 2 would be run entirely by the national government service provider, Thubelisha, and that the government structures that had previously overseen and managed Phase 1 would not be involved. Phase 2 of the N2 Gateway Project involved an agreement among the national and provincial governments, Thubelisha and First National Bank (FNB) to build 3 000 bonded houses in Joe Slovo and Delft costing from R150 000 to R250 000 (Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction, 2009:15). Access to these houses would be through FNB bonds available to applicants earning between R3 500 and R7 500 per month (Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction, 2009:15).

As has been pointed out by several Joe Slovo residents, including members of the Joe Slovo Task Team, the average income in the Joe Slovo informal settlement was not more than R1 500 per month. Thus it was increasingly clear that Phase 2 housing in Joe Slovo would also be out of reach of most residents. To enable work to begin in Joe Slovo, 1 400 temporary units located in temporary relocation areas (TRAs) in Delft 7-9 were being constructed to relocate the existing residents of Joe Slovo. In Delft Symphony, Phase 3 of the project aimed to deliver 6 240 houses for ownership and 600 rental units, while in Delft 7-9, Phase 3 of the project plan was set to deliver 4 500 houses for ownership and almost 800 rental units.

With the announcement of Phase 2 of N2 Gateway Project that permanent housing in Joe Slovo would be credit-linked 'bond' houses, it became clear that few residents of the Joe Slovo settlement would be able to access this housing and that the vast majority would have to move to Delft where affordable housing would be made available as part of Phase 3 of the project. This, coupled with the experience of housing allocation in Phase 1, eroded any confidence that Joe Slovo residents might have had in the intentions of the project proponents in providing them with houses (Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction, 2009:15).

Demographic Profile: Community Focus Group

Out of a sample of 500 possible respondents, 475 of them returned questionnaires, 275 (58%) were male and 200 (42%) were female. In terms of age demographic, 16% of the respondents were between 15 and 25; 41% between 26 and 35; 20% between 36 and 45; 18% were between 46 and 55; and 5% were between 56 and 65. Forty-eight percent (227) respondents are unemployed and depend on family members' assistance; 4% (20) of the unemployed are disabled and receive grants from government and 18% (85) of the respondents are still at school. Twelve per cent (58) of the respondents are self-employed (mostly in tuck shops, in spaza shops and as hawkers).

Most of the respondents are long term residents of Langa (Joe Slovo) settlement. Twenty per cent (95) of the respondents have resided in the area for between 5 and 10 years, the majority 54% (255) of the respondents have resided there for between 11 and 20 years, while 26% (125) of the respondents have resided in Langa (Joe Slovo) settlement for between 21 and 30 years.

Community participation in the N2 Gateway Housing Project

Ideally, community participation should contribute to development efforts in communities by empowering community members, implementing poverty alleviation strategies, and fostering partnerships between stakeholders. To this end, community participation can create opportunities and avenues for communities to express their views and opinions in matters of governance. Communities have to be engaged throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of development projects to ensure the transfer of skills, knowledge and ownership of the process by local people (Draai & Taylor, 2009). Development projects thus can only be legitimised when communities are actively (as opposed to passively) involved in the decision-making, implementation and evaluation phases of those projects. The community must be given the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility.

Regarding the N2 Gateway Housing Project, not surprisingly, analysis of the data obtained from interviews and questionnaires revealed that government officials on the one hand, and the Langa (Joe Slovo) community members on the other, had far more differences than similarities in their responses to the same line of questioning. As evidence of this, conflicting responses from government officials and community members were recorded regarding the extent to which Langa (Joe Slovo) community members participated in the planning and implementation of the N2 Gateway Housing Project.

More specifically, for example, analysis of the data showed that regarding the statement posed to community members "the community played a role in implementation of the N2 gateway housing project", 4% (15) of the respondents agreed with the statement, while 6% (30) were neutral, 30% (145) disagreed, and 60% (285) strongly disagreed.

Similarly, regarding a related statement conveyed to community members “the community participated in one or more of the stages of the N2 Gateway Housing Project”, 8% (36) agreed, 10% (49) were neutral, 24% (115) disagreed and 58% (275) strongly disagreed. With regards to the statement, “the N2 Gateway Housing Project benefited the community”, none (0%) agreed or strongly agreed, while 16% (75) were neutral, 28% (134) disagreed, and 56% (266) strongly disagreed.

By way of contrast, data analysis of the interview instrument revealed that on being questioned on “the extent of community participation in planning and implementation of the N2 Gateway Housing Project”, all three local government officials interviewed asserted in the affirmative that the community participated, and further expressed that there was good co-operation between the project team and the community. In the same interview question, Langa (Joe Slovo) community leaders, on the contrary, indicated that the community were not involved in the planning and implementation of the project and further maintain that government failed to facilitate meaningful consultation.

Public meetings ought to be used to facilitate effective needs assessment and communication, and thus these meetings should be considered central to realising authentic public participation. While government officials in charge of the project stated that they organised public meetings as a strategy to allow for communication to take place between the project team and the community, community members, to the contrary, claimed that meetings had not been held with them, but that they instead received information about the project through the media.

On many other questions relating to public participation, a similar pattern of conflicting views between the government’s project team and the community was observed. This means that the empirical part of the study is inconclusive with respect to understanding the extent of public participation in the project. Being open to a triangulation approach, however, a literature review and personal observation were also employed.

Synopsis from the literature: the Auditor General’s findings

The Auditor General’s Report and minutes of project meetings revealed that the project was not managed economically, effectively and efficiently (Auditor General Report, 2009). The report further stated that problems arose from the fact that the business plan had not been finalised and approved before construction began. This reveals that Government did not create and maintain meaningful records of the project. The Auditor General also found that the memorandum of understanding that was signed by all three spheres of government to define roles and responsibilities did not clearly define the individual roles, and necessary legislation and policies were not applied when construction began. The Auditor General listed the shortcomings as:

- identification and securing of sufficient funds was not finalised prior to construction

- detailed geotechnical surveys were not completed prior to the start of the project
- the selection of beneficiaries was not finalised before construction began
- the time frame for completion of the project was not realistic
- affordable housing was not provided for the identified target market
- funding arrangements for the project were not finalised and secured before the project was started.

The problems of the project come down to poor planning and implementation. Overall, from the above presentation of primary and secondary findings of this study, it can be deduced that the beneficiaries' need for engagement was evident not only in the context of their eviction to Delft, but at every stage of the project. Intended beneficiaries should have been consulted when Government was planning for the Langa (Joe Slovo) community. That could have prevented the situation and experiences that Langa (Joe Slovo) community members had to endure. These findings expose many gaps in the planning and implementation of the N2 Gateway Housing Project. A question is raised about whether government overlooked the participation of people living in poverty, or whether government saw their input as non-descript and unproductive. Government claimed to have everything under control despite the fact that the project was failing miserably. Ignorance of legislation, policies and participatory democracy could be the causes. Despite all the challenges mentioned above, the City of Cape Town highlighted that a total of 9 576 housing units were provided in the Western Cape Province (Hans, 2009:1).

CONCLUDING

This article assessed challenges of community participation in the on-going N2 Gateway Housing Project. The problems encountered in rolling out this project highlight the dangers of housing mega-projects using a public-private partnership approach for formal delivery as an instrument to address immediate and critical societal needs. It can generally be noted that despite the development of various policies since 1994 to address the housing backlog aimed at improving the living conditions of those in need and previously disadvantaged groups, housing policy interventions are yet to yield sufficient positive outcomes. The evidence explored strongly suggests that the public-private partnership approach, with limited community participation, was not an ideal strategy for managing the N2 Gateway Housing Project.

As inconclusive as the empirical portion of the study may be in terms of apportioning blame for the difficulties and failures experienced in the N2 Gateway Housing Project, it is equally hard to accept that beneficiaries can bear much of that blame as the project is a government conceived and government rolled-

out initiative. Conventional thinking, of course, is that affected and interested communities need to be brought on board in a participatory manner if projects in their communities are to succeed. Community participation should be a permanent feature in implementing development projects. Inter alia, two concluding facts were brought to the surface in this investigative case analysis: firstly, Government failed to consult the people; and secondly, the N2 Gateway Housing Project enjoys little if any success.

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