



Lessons learned from *in situ* upgrading and eradication of informal settlement in Gauteng Province in South Africa

Eradication of
informal
settlement

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Clinton Ohls Aigbayboa and Wellington D. Thwala
*Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying,
University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa*

Received 27 November 2009
Accepted 20 February 2010

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to give an insight into lessons learned so far on the *in situ* upgrading and eradication of informal settlements in South Africa. This is with a view to accessing progress made to date, the line of focus and to ascertain whether *in situ* upgrading or eradication of informal settlement is the best option in solving the problem of informal settlement integration into the large society.

Design/methodology/approach – The research is conducted with reference to existing theoretical literature, published and unpublished South Africa research. The study is mainly a literature survey/review and looks at challenges that have been overcome to bring about the success made to date, thus striving to achieve the goals and objectives of a city without slums. The research ties up the identified challenges with recommendations to the problems to enhance the reality of having a city without slums.

Findings – One of the primary findings that emanated from the study revealed that all development where people have to be displaced or inconvenienced has come with problems. Other findings attribute the little success achieved to date to the *in situ* upgrading of the existing settlement and the eradication of the settlement. Though policy activated has not been well implemented for the betterment of all, progress has been made nonetheless.

Originality/value – The upgrading and eradication of informal settlement have long been a subject of global discussion, which has taken firmer root since it was declared to be one of the Millennium Development Goals agenda. The paper contributes to this body of knowledge.

Keywords South Africa, Housing, Government policy, Regeneration

Paper type General review

1. Introduction

The 1997 South Africa Housing Act defines “housing” as a variety of processes through which habitable, stable and sustainable public and private residential environments are created for viable households and communities. South Africa is one of the 30 countries that included the right to housing in its Constitution (UN Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, 2001). The right to housing is subject to progressive realisation and over the last 15 years, the African National Congress led government has vigorously ensured that essential services were available to advance the lives of ordinary people (Financial and Fiscal Commission Submission for the Division of Revenue, 2006/2007). However, the State has also taken reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate housing (Department of Housing, 2006).

The South African government since 1994 have initiated and implemented several housing delivery programmes and subsidy mechanisms to provide houses to its citizens thus eliminating the incidence of slum housing which is associated with poverty. This is done to fulfill the vision to adequate housing for all as reflected in the National Housing



Policy Framework, which is to increase housing's share in the total State budget to 5 per cent and to increase delivery on a sustainable basis to a peak level of 338,000 units per annum, within a five-year period, thereby achieving the target of the Government of National Unity of 1,000,000 houses in five years (South Africa Department of Housing, 2004). South Africa's housing programme was redirected when the comprehensive plan for sustainable human settlements was introduced in October 2004 to address the problem of informal settlement in the country. The plan builds on the 1994 White Paper on Housing but shifts the focus of the national housing programme from simply ensuring the delivery of affordable housing units to qualifying beneficiaries, but to also provide housing for those living in informal settlement thereby ensuring that adequate housing is provided for settlements that are both sustainable and pleasant (Department of Housing, 2004a, b). Since the current housing subsidy programme is not specifically designed and geared for informal settlement upgrading, the informal settlement intervention act was instituted in terms of section 3(4) (g) of the Housing Act, 1997, to cater for the upgrading of informal settlement in the country. Upgrading of informal settlements takes the form of grants to municipalities to enable them to respond rapidly to informal settlement upgrading needs by means of the provision of land, municipal services infrastructure and social amenities. It includes the possible relocation and resettlement of people on a voluntary and co-operative basis in appropriate cases if upgrading is not possible (South Africa Department of Housing, 2004). Five years after the enactment of the Breaking New Ground (BNG) Policy, which takes its objectives from the informal settlement intervention act of 1997, it is yet to break any new ground as intended in the national housing policy refinement in 2004. Instead, motivation to eradicate or eliminate informal settlements through their removal has intensified.

2. Purpose of the paper

The research is a summary of lessons learned so far on the *in situ* upgrading and eradication of informal settlement in South Africa. The progress made to date is accessed and also points into the experiences gained to date on the upgrading of informal settlement.

It further points to the challenges that have been encountered in the upgrading of informal settlement and a further evaluation of the reasons why the problems of informal settlement still persist in South Africa. The paper ties up by harnessing the identified gap with solutions to the problems to enhance the reality of having a city without slum in 2014.

3. South African approach to informal settlements

Among many other countries, South Africa is currently faced with problem of informal settlements upgrading. The unemployment rate that is still very high has made many people to live in an unstructured settlement (Huchzermeyer, 2009). Statistics South Africa (2009) asserted that the population of unemployed people seeking employment has increased from 3,873 to 4,184 million. South African cities are hugely inadequate – shaped by discriminatory and repressive apartheid planning and further expanded by powerful and far from equitable market processes, driving apartheid's planned inequality and exclusion even deeper, and effortlessly overriding attempts at urban democratisation and integration (Turok, 2001; Huchzermeyer, 2009). Informal settlements are never welcomed as informal land occupation by the poor has been seen as entirely ineffectual in shaping the city (Huchzermeyer, 2009).

Informal settlements (often referred to as squatter settlements or shanty towns) are dense settlements comprising communities housed in self-constructed shelters under conditions of informal or traditional land tenure. They are common features of developing countries and are typically the product of an urgent need for shelter by the urban poor. As such they are characterised by a dense proliferation of small, make-shift shelters built from diverse materials, degradation of the local ecosystem and a severe social problems. Informal settlement occur when the current land administration and planning fails to address the need of the whole community. These areas are characterised by rapid, unstructured and unplanned development. On a global scale informal settlements are a significant problem especially in third world countries housing the world's disadvantaged. South Africa has a high rate of population growth that is impacting on the cities in the form of burgeoning squatter camps and informal settlements (Saff, 1993). South African total population is estimated at approximately 47.5 million with estimates for annual population growth for urban Africans ranging from 2.4 to 3.5 per cent. The majority of South Africa's poor are African, as are the majority of informal settlement dwellers. In 1994, approximately 1.06 million households comprising 7.7 million people lived in informal settlements. Coupled to this, an estimated 720,000 serviced sites that were provided by provincial legislatures under the previous government required upgrading and 450,000 people lived in various, often inappropriate, forms of hostel accommodation (Republic of South Africa, 2003, South African Institute of Race Relations 1996; Barry and Mason, 1997; Muzondo *et al.*, 2004).

Further research as reported by the Development Action Group (2007) has shown that South Africa has a high rate of urban population growth that directly contributes to the mushrooming of squatter camps and informal settlements. Cape Town's informal settlement, during the course of this research is growing at a substantial proportion of its population in formal properties that need improved shelter. In 1995 it was estimated that more than 400,000 people were inadequately housed in the Cape Town Metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework (1995) cited urban growth rates for Cape Town of between 1.8 and 5 per cent per annum. This was due both to organic growth and a major influx of people, predominantly Xhosa speakers, with the easing of the pass laws in 1986 (Mazur and Qangule 1995).

The rapid growth of informal settlements in the urban areas of South Africa poses significant challenges to both national- and local-level government. The State's response to informal settlement over the last 12 years has been characterised by disaster management strategies in the period prior to 2004 and thereafter programmes to eradicate informal settlements through large-scale capital intensive structural interventions (often as rollover or greenfield developments) have been underway (Development Action Group, 2007).

However, informal settlements are a manifestation of the two main challenges facing human settlements development in the new millennium which are rapid urbanisation and the urbanisation of poverty (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 2003). The UN-Habitat (2006) estimates that in the year 2006 nearly 1 billion people live in informal settlement areas in the cities of the world, most of these in the developing countries. A greater concern is that if this is not dealt with properly, the number of informal settlement dwellers is predicted to double by 2030. In response to these critical circumstances, the "cities without slum" Action Plan was launched by the cities alliance in 1999, which later on was endorsed by the 150 heads of states and government attending the United Nations Millennium Summit in the year 2000, of which South Africa was a signatory. The plan was reflected in the United Nations

Millennium Declaration, along with the other goals set to “ensure environmental sustainability”. The goal is to “achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020” (United Nations, 2000) and not the displacement and eradication of the settlement were not necessary.

4. Informal settlement upgrading programme – South Africa

The main objective of this programme as contained in the South Africa Housing code (2004) is to facilitate the structured upgrading of informal settlements. It was noted in the housing code that the challenges of informal settlement upgrading would be approached from a pragmatic perspective in the face of changing realities and many uncertainties. Informal settlements are not to be viewed as merely a “housing problem”, requiring a “housing solution” but rather as a manifestation of structural social change, the resolution of which requires multi-sectoral partnership, long-term commitment and political endurance. The Programme promotes the upgrading of informal settlements to achieve the following complex and interrelated policy objectives such as tenure security, health and safety, empowerment such as social and economic development, and social capital.

Under this programme government subsidies are neither calculated as a standardised amount per household, nor to be drawn down on the basis of individual households’ housing subsidy eligibility. Instead, grant funding for land, infrastructure and community facilities is applied to the community as a whole (with the exception of the individualised or household-linked subsidy in the fourth phase of the programme for improving top-structures or houses). The funding mechanism is therefore inclusive of those previously not qualifying for subsidies under the National Housing Subsidy Programme (Huchzermeyer, 2009). The programme requires an investigation by the municipalities into the feasibility of *in situ* upgrading and assumes that relocation is necessary in some cases, but only as a last resort.

The Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme responds to concerns about housing rights violations raised in a number of court cases since 2000, and it was welcomed by human rights organisations such as the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) (2005). The programme was launched through a pilot project in each of the nine provinces. However, cities such as Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni (the former East Rand) and Ethekwini (Durban), while professing to upgrade informal settlements *in situ*, do not apply the principles and funding mechanisms of the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme. Instead, they deal with informal settlements in the conventional project-linked subsidy approach (based on subsidy eligibility of individual households), resulting in relocation or at best disruptive “shack shifting” or rollover upgrading, mostly with the displacement of non-qualifiers of the housing subsidy. Thus city officials consciously or unwittingly act as servants of orderly development, global competitiveness and the market, rather than as implementers of the transformative aspects of the Constitution (Huchzermeyer, 2009) and of progressive policy and legislation that has been developed to ensure the realisation of constitutional rights.

The introduction of the Breaking New Ground Framework in 2004 resulted in the formulation of the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme which provides the platform to initiate upgrading projects which do not require project-linked housing subsidy finance (Development Action Group, 2007). Since the introduction of the programme government has only focused on an approach aimed to eradicate informality (Department of Housing, 2004a, b), either through evictions or highly technocratic and often market-driven infrastructure development upgrading programmes (Huchzermeyer,

2004). These approaches ignore the link between economic security and the growth of settlements and thus do not address the growing inequity in South Africa as they have marginal economic benefits for the poor and do not acknowledge and preserve investments which informal settlement dwellers place in their homes (Hardoy *et al.*, 2001). The eradication of what appears to be the greatest threat to the property market (shacks) is more powerful than constitutional obligations (Huchzermeyer, 2009).

The Minister of Housing in 2004 highlighted the need for government intervention to improve conditions in informal settlements. A lack of infrastructure and effective governance were two key areas identified as being in need of improvement. Informal dwellings are deficient mostly in water, sanitation, electricity, ventilation, food preparation and storage and such conditions are associated with a range of health risks including diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases and the hazards of fire (Richard, 2006).

Social problems, such as crime, also affect residents in informal settlements where they become more fearful at night due to the lack of basic policing, services and infrastructure and this increases the risk of victimisation (Shaw *et al.*, 2001).

Housing policy at national level underwent a revision after the first ten years of democracy (Department of Housing, 2004a, b). The revised housing programme, which was included as Chapter 13 of the Housing Code as Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme (Department of Housing, 2004a, b), was appropriately termed BNG; whereas practitioners and analysts have found the new Housing Programme to be largely in continuity with previous policy (Charlton and Kihato, 2006).

Informal Settlement Upgrading Programmes has not matched the rapid delivery of housing pace by the coordinated supply of social infrastructure such as schools, clinics, sports and recreation facilities, etc. Since the inception of this programme in November 1999 until 31 March 2007, 141 projects with a total of 139,649 subsidies have been approved (National Department of Housing, 2007).

5. Challenges of informal settlement upgrading in South Africa

The tone of the government's current campaign against informal land development and informal house construction by the poor suggests that it is dealing with a sinister, undesirable, pathological and criminal process (Huchzermeyer, 2009). Terminology otherwise applied to life-threatening epidemics and violent crime is officially used: "eradication", "elimination" and "zero tolerance". This aligns with the continued fixation with orderly and segregated development in South African cities (Huchzermeyer, 2003, 2009).

Informal settlement eradication (elimination or destruction of informal settlement) is often justified with reference to the normatively inappropriate "cities without slum" campaign of the cities alliance, a joint programme of UN-Habitat and the World Bank, also incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 2003). Millennium Development Goal Target 7 is officially targeted to significantly improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 (United Nations, 2000), if reached, which is widely acknowledged to be unlikely (UN-Habitat, 2005), would affect only 10 per cent of the world's growing slum population of the year 2000 and would not achieve Cities Without Slum campaign of the cities alliance (Bazoglu, 2005). Several countries' governments, South Africa included, interpret the Millennium Development Goals to mean eradication (elimination or destruction) of slums, rather than on the spot (*in situ*) improvement of the lives of those living in them.

The following is a summary of the challenges that has been encountered in the upgrading of informal settlement in South Africa – Gauteng, to be specific:

- (1) Budgetary constraints from both Department of Housing and municipalities funding for bulk services and internal services top-ups – means a long waiting time for most settlements.
- (2) Land legal issues relating to complex statutory land assembly processes.
- (3) Lack of bulk services infrastructure in many areas.
- (4) Relocation issues such as:
 - most relocation and eradication not well planned have resulted in worsened life condition due to distance of the relocation sites from livelihoods; and
 - disruption of social networks, livelihoods and schooling and even in some cases access to basic necessities such as water and shelter.
- (5) Developers have been reluctant to work on projects involving informal settlements.
- (6) A huge implementation gap in terms of progressive legislation, with finances and technical skills lacking. Mobilising funds is still a fundamental problem, particularly because financial institutions are still not willing to make loans to the low-income sector.
- (7) Eradication in most cases is a housing right violation as seen from a number of cases.
- (8) Lack of communication at all three tiers of government with the informal settlements (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 2007).

From the above challenges, it shows explicitly while the problems of informal settlement still persist in the country – Gauteng province specifically. It can be said that *in situ* upgrading is better and more effective drawing from the above challenges. Eradication though might be necessary in some instances; however, if it is not well structured and planned, it does inflate more problems on the informal settlement dwellers poor living condition. However, one direction that should not be overlooked in incorporating the informal settlement to the large society is the improvement of the lives of those living in them. If this is not done, no matter the level of upgrading, informal settlement will be a reality that the government will have to put up with.

6. Informal settlements in Gauteng province

Gauteng is a province of South Africa (see Figure 1). It was formed from part of the old Transvaal province after South Africa's first all-race elections on 27 April 1994. It was initially named Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging and was renamed Gauteng in December 1994 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gauteng>). Situated in the heart of the Highveld, Gauteng is the smallest province in South Africa, with only 1.4 per cent of the land area, but it is highly urbanised and was previously reported to have a population of 8,837,178 (Statistics South Africa, 2001). But as of 2007(update), Gauteng has a population over 10,450,000, making it the most populous province in South Africa as put forward by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (Community Survey, 2007). Gauteng is growing at around 100,000 people every year (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gauteng>).

Gauteng province is currently home to 10.45 million people (Community Survey, 2007), as against 9.18 as reported in the 2001 South African National Census, which was almost 20 per cent of the total South African population. Gauteng province is also



Source: Wikipedia (2009)

Figure 1.
Map of the municipalities
of Gauteng

the fastest growing province, experiencing a population growth of over 20 per cent between the 1996 and 2001 censuses, and currently 13.9 per cent in the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Survey (Community Survey, 2007).

Housing provision in Gauteng province has become a burden and a nightmare to the Gauteng provincial government and the National housing department. This is because of the high influx of people from other provinces, neighbouring countries and others. This is due to the fact that Gauteng is considered the economic hub of South Africa and contributes heavily in the financial, manufacturing, transport, technology and telecommunications sectors, among others. Though, it is the smallest of all the provinces, but faced with a high level of housing backlog.

In his 2004 State of the Nation Address, the President, Thabo Mbeki, committed Government to the task of building a People's Contract for the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment as well as the improvement in the quality of life of people. The President indicated that a comprehensive programme dealing with human settlement and social infrastructure development should be prepared (Department of Housing, 2006). The statement made mandated the Gauteng Department of Housing to initiate the registration of all inhabitants residing in informal settlements to record details of occupants to establish the backlog and subsequent challenges in terms of the formalisation of all informal settlements by 2014 in the Gauteng Province (Department of Housing, 2006).

The Gauteng Department of Housing went further to confirm this commitment by unveiling the provincial plan for formalising all the informal settlements situated on safe, habitable and appropriately designed land, and said it would eradicate all the

informal settlements in Gauteng by 2014 (Department of Housing, 2006). A total of 405 informal settlements were visited in the Gauteng province. In the process, 395 informal settlements were identified for eradication by 2014. Out of the 395 identified, only 122 of the settlements were suitable for *in situ* upgrading and the remaining earmarked for relocation to identified projects (Department of Housing, 2009).

However, by August 2008, a total of 68 of 122 identified suitable for *in situ* upgrading has been formalised, with an additional 56 to be formalised by the end of 2009. In addition, only 12 informal settlements have been eradicated to date. A further 24 informal settlements are in the process of being eradicated, with housing construction underway. This will bring the provincial total of eradicated informal settlements to 36 in 2009 (Department of Housing, 2009). The current confirmed figure for informal settlements in Johannesburg as at today is 235.

7. Informal settlements – comparison between South Africa and Brazil

The thinking that the task of hosting the 2010 Soccer World Cup requires the elimination of informal structures in order to welcome international spectators is shaping approaches in high offices of provincial and local government. This thinking is distant from contemporary policy in Brazil, a country to which the South African government, business and academia look for south-south comparison, inspiration and partnership. In response to market-driven fragmentation of its cities, Brazil has embraced informal land occupation as a process that can yield desirable results in terms of land use and land distribution. In 1988, an amendment to the Brazilian Constitution introduced an innovative legal provision that transfers ownership rights to informal occupants of private land after a period of peaceful and uncontested occupation of five years (Fernandes and Rolnik, 1998; Huchzermeyer, 2009). Thus, unlike the case in South Africa, *de facto* use of the land in Brazilian cities has influence in the planning process. Although far from ideal, Brazilian cities are visibly shaped by informal processes driven by the poor, as much as they are by the market. Time and again, Brazilian urban scholars are surprised by the harsh control maintained over the South African urban environment, particularly Johannesburg, many years after apartheid (Huchzermeyer, 2009). They question the widespread un-cooperativeness by local and provincial government to recognise informality as a process that can positively shape urban space.

8. Findings

The paper presents the following findings.

Findings that emanated from the study revealed that *in situ* upgrading is preferred to the eradication of informal settlement, and thus the success so far achieved in the upgrading of informal settlement can be attributed to *in situ* upgrading. But overall, progress has been made and the implementation still needs improvement in terms of the application in different communalities. Further finding showed that most relocation sites present disadvantages in terms of access to schooling, livelihoods and the job market, public transport and recreational amenities. Furthermore, other observation revealed that most of the informal settlements would like the feasibility of *in situ* upgrading to be investigated rigorously (as called for by the programme), and if relocation is found to be necessary for some or all of the residents “as a last resort” (as stated in the programme), they would like the same principles and approaches to be applied to the relocation (as required by the program). While detailed case studies of these settlements would provide deeper insight into the contradictions of local government intervention, as they are indicative of the dominant understanding and

interpretation of informal settlements, and reveal important aspects of re-skilling or mindset change that need to be addressed in order for the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme to be rolled out.

9. Lesson learned

A number of important and valuable lessons have been learned during the period 1994-2009 with respect to the upgrading of informal settlement or *in situ* upgrades of informal settlements in South Africa. They can be summarised as follows and can be used as a basis for formulating new strategies and approaches:

- Conventional informal upgrading strategies have resulted in a large number of relocations. If the remaining informal settlements were to be upgraded utilising such strategies then the scale of relocations to poorly located, peripheral areas would be vast. Such a strategy would probably not be workable or sustainable and as such government should adhere to the policy document for better implementation of the informal settlement upgrading programme.
- Housing and infrastructure is typically prioritised and dealt with in isolation from other important supports or interventions such as economic development, health care, crime prevention, education and food security among others.
- Up until recently, the national policy framework for housing was relatively inflexible and was designed around greenfield (as opposed to upgrade) projects.
- Consolidation and the incremental development of sites by beneficiaries were far greater where a higher level of service was installed.
- The number of non-South Africans residing in informal settlement sites is on the increase to the extent that a number of projects would not be viable in terms of qualifying criteria for the allocation of housing to informal settlement dwellers.

However, efforts have been made to create sustainable settlements for the informal settlements that has either been upgraded or relocated. There still are, however, enormous challenges to develop informal settlements in way that allow residents to create livelihood, access social services and enjoy a supportive environment.

10. Conclusion and recommendations

Informal settlement upgrading by virtue of its nature is not simply the responsibility of Housing Departments, but rather the multi-sectoral responsibility of a range of stakeholders or partners who should work collectively to address the community's development priorities through a range of complementary social and physical development initiatives that address urban livelihoods, land tenure, co-operative governance, social inclusion and environmental security. In this context, *in situ* upgrading creates an impetus for inclusive and integrated development, which has the potential to reduce poverty, and to socially, physically and economically integrate an informal settlement into the wider city. However, the following recommendations are made to improve informal settlement upgrading and ultimately the lives of those living in slum in South African Gauteng province, if South Africa is prepared to meet the Millennium Development Goals:

- The government should know that community organisation in South African "informal" settlements must also be recognised as a primarily human endeavour. Though most community leaders are corrupt and occasionally enrich themselves,

the situation is far from that in the famous favelas of Rio de Janeiro, which are ruled by drug-dealing gangs (Souza, 2005). Far from promoting informal settlements, they seek recognition of the existing situation and a solution that best responds to the residents' needs.

- Government must build on community involvement and make informal settlement residents to play an active part in the upgrading or relocation process.
- Local government officials on the ground should ensure to balance the human needs-driven demands of informal settlement communities with those of the discourse of global competitiveness.
- The constitutional rights of those already affected and those to be affected by the eradication of informal settlement must be protected and restored.
- Informal Settlement Upgrading Program officials must be sensitised to the obligations placed upon them by the transformative South African Constitution, and understands that the demands of global competitiveness are subordinate to these obligations. This sensitisation must be informed by a deeper understanding of the spatial legacy of the apartheid city, orderly development and the market.
- The Department of Housing must re-address the current way Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme implementation is being handled. The original policy document and strategies must be followed to avoid the displacement and suffering inflicted on the lives of those living in slums.
- Furthermore, government must ensure that Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme creates jobs and improve the lives of the people living in slums. If this is not made a priority, the environment being upgraded today will become the slums of tomorrow to be upgraded or to be eradicated again.

The foregoing calls for a deeper reform of urban planning beyond orderly development. This is to provide the tools to give South African cities a human face that is not contorted by repression and exclusion.

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Corresponding author

Clinton Ohls Aigbavboa can be contacted at: aigclinton@gmail.com